# ABSTRACT OF THESIS

*Name of Candidate* CARLYLE WINTON HOLTE

*Address* 316 Manitou Northfield, Minnesota, U. S. A.

*Degree* Ph.D. *Date* May 15, 1969

*Title of Thesis* The Subjective Element in the Hermeneutics of Luther and Melanchthon

This thesis attempts to clarify and describe the role of the Biblical interpreter in the work of exposition of the Scripture by observing the hermeneutics of Luther and Melanchthon. Since the historians of interpretation have but vaguely referred to such functions as faith within this process, inquiry is directed toward the explication of this term. Inasmuch as allegations of subjectivity have been generously made against the two reformers there is an apologetic factor woven in, seeking to establish a valid subjective element without opening the doors to subjectivity.

The aim of the historical section is to give a proper background to the main body of the work. The development of allegory is described through analysis of Philo and Origen. Attention is given to the contrasting views of the Antiochenes. The expository contributions of Augustine are considered and the subsequent developments in the later middle ages. Throughout the historical chapter special consideration is given to the recognized role of the interpreter and to the presuppositions on the nature of history as a shaping force in hermeneutics.

Some of the basic hermeneutical positions of Martin Luther are reflected through a delineation of three major controversies in which he engaged relatively early in his reforming career. Through a brief study of his clash with Latomus the point is made that Luther rejected allegory along with the non-historical presuppositions which in fact left the expositor free for a destructive subjectivity. The study of the controversy between Luther and Erasmus reveals Luther's rejection of that type of historicism which believes that human language is completely capable of carrying the divine message. The Schwärmer set before Luther a theology based on an anti-historical ground which exalts the subjectivity

*Use other side if necessary.*

of religious experience. Luther rejects this attitude and emphasizes the centrality of the given Word of God in history, as previously he has stressed the vitality of that Word in his controversy with Latomus, and the paradox of the God who is hidden in His revelation as a counter to Erasmus' peculiar insistence on the perspicuity of Scripture. It is contended that Philip Melanchthon agrees substantially in the positions thus taken by Luther.

The primary affirmation of the dissertation is set forth in the following paragraph: "The subjective element of hermeneutics for Luther and Melanchthon consists in this: that the saving work of God, graciously applied to the interpreter in the midst of human history, is accepted as the heuristic paradigm for the understanding of God's living Word to men. It is important that this saving work be seen as bringing man into the new life of faith and hope, that this work has already established a new reality together with openness to the ultimate fulfilment of the work and will of God."

The component elements of this central paragraph are illustrated in the works of both Luther and Melanchthon, with the conclusion that both men agree in this central hermeneutical concern, although their precise movement from the center might in cases vary according to their objectives and tasks and personal predilections.

It is contended that this description of the subjective element in the hermeneutics of Luther and Melanchthon is consistent with their general theological position and in agreement with the evidences in their respective extant works; that the thesis is in itself coherent as a structure; that the thesis is applicable with significant profit to the expository enterprise; that it is of ecumenical acceptability as evidenced by kindred statements from representative theologians and churchmen.

# THE SUBJECTIVE ELEMENT IN THE HERMENEUTICS OF LUTHER AND MELANCHTHON

Carlyle W. Holte

Thesis presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the University of Edinburgh
in the Faculty of Divinity

1969

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This thesis attempts to clarify and describe the role of the Biblical interpreter in the work of exposition of the Scripture by observing the hermeneutics of Luther and Melanchthon. Since the historians of interpretation have but vaguely referred to such functions as faith within this process, inquiry is directed toward the explication of this term. Inasmuch as allegations of subjectivity have been generously made against the two reformers there is an apologetic factor woven in, seeking to establish a valid subjective element without opening the doors to subjectivity.

The aim of the historical section is to give a proper background to the main body of the work. The development of allegory is described through analysis of Philo and Origen. Attention is given to the contrasting views of the Antiochenes. The expository contributions of Augustine are considered and the subsequent developments in the later middle ages. Throughout the historical chapter special consideration is given to the recognized role of the interpreter and to the presuppositions on the nature of history as a shaping force in hermeneutics.

Some of the basic hermeneutical positions of Martin Luther are reflected through a delineation of three major controversies in which he engaged relatively early in his reforming career. Through a brief study of his clash with Latomus the point is made that Luther rejected

allegory along with the non-historical presuppositions which in fact left the expositor free for a destructive subjectivity. The study of the controversy between Luther and Erasmus reveals Luther's rejection of that type of historicism which believes that human language is completely capable of carrying the divine message. The Schwärmer set before Luther a theology based on an anti-historical ground which exalts the subjectivity of religious experience. Luther rejects this attitude and emphasizes the centrality of the given Word of God in history, as previously he has stressed the vitality of that Word in his controversy with Latomus, and the paradox of the God who is hidden in His revelation as a counter to Erasmus' peculiar insistence on the perspicuity of Scripture. It is contended that Philip Melanchthon agrees substantially in the positions thus taken by Luther.

The primary affirmation of the dissertation is set forth in the following paragraph: "The subjective element of hermeneutics for Luther and Melanchthon consists in this: that the saving work of God, graciously applied to the interpreter in the midst of human history, is accepted as the heuristic paradigm for the understanding of God's living Word to men. It is important that this saving work be seen as bringing man into the new life of faith and hope, that this work has already established a new reality together with openness to the ultimate fulfilment of the work and will of God."

The component elements of this central paragraph are illustrated in the works of both Luther and Melanchthon, with the conclusion that

both men agree in this central hermeneutical concern, although their precise movement from the center might in cases vary according to their objectives and tasks and personal predilections.

It is contended that this description of the subjective element in the hermeneutics of Luther and Melanchthon is consistent with their general theological position and in agreement with the evidences in their respective extant works; that the thesis is in itself coherent as a structure; that the thesis is applicable with significant profit to the expository enterprise; that it is of ecumenical acceptability as evidenced by kindred statements from representative theologians and churchmen.

# PREFACE

The topic for this dissertation grew out of a complex of concerns and interests. My responsibilities as a teacher of courses in religion in a church-related liberal arts college posed continuing questions as to the proper mode of understanding and as to the training for understanding of the Scriptures. Standing in the Lutheran tradition I had a vested interest in the theology of the two great reformers, Luther and Melanchthon. The continuing, tantalizing problem of the theological consanguinity of these two figures gave zest to the research.

In the course of my research it became evident that many other scholars were pursuing studies either directly related to my work or impinging closely on it. Hermeneutics moved rapidly from a sphere of tertiary importance to a position claiming the role of theological propaedeutic. Historiography, history, history and eschatology became vital issues for both professional historians and theologians. The bibliography of secondary sources thus mounted in geometric proportion. Any remote possibility of canvassing this vast field became an utter impossibility, and I make no claim to any but a preliminary appreciation of the implications of much of this recent development.

I have worked largely with the primary sources in the works of Luther and Melanchthon. Reformation scholars are currently producing a large amount of new editings and translations of the works of both

Luther and Melanchthon. The critical work involved in this production may not properly be overlooked, therefore I have drawn on all the translations known to me and have accepted the resulting apparent haphazardness of reference in order to achieve the net gain of the newer criticism. A correlation backward to the classic collections of the Reformation materials would, to my mind, have been pro forma and inessential to the basic concerns of establishing evidence. In the area of secondary materials I have attempted to make a distinction so as to rely more heavily on the works of Reformation specialists. I have, nevertheless, felt free to elaborate by a more random sampling of other cogent references from a broader selection of writers.

For consistency in style I have had constant reference to A Manual for Writers by Kate L. Turabian, which is recognized by the University of Chicago and other American universities as definitive. In matters of orthography and punctuation I beg leave to be guided by standard American guides. Citations in Latin and German have been included without translation. In the case of citations from Scandinavian materials I have translated for the convenience of my readers. Deviations from these normal practices will be indicated in the footnotes.

The librarians and staffs of several libraries have been helpful beyond the minimum requirements of their positions. I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to the institutions which have made materials available, and the staffs of New College, the University of Edinburgh;

the University of Aarhus, Denmark; Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, U.S.A.; and St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, U.S.A.

During the time that I have been employed in these researches a series of organic breakdowns of my eyes has left me with limited visual ability and tolerance for close work. Permission from the University and my adviser to continue working over an extended term was itself the greatest encouragement to make the effort. Family, friends and colleagues have been instrumental in giving me a more healthy attitude to the problem and in building my desire to continue what was begun in more promising days.

My special appreciation must be expressed to my supervisor at New College, Professor Thomas F. Torrance, for his assistance and encouragement. My study term at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, was marked by significant contacts with Professor Regin Prenter and Professor K. E. Løgstrup and I owe them a great debt. To my present colleagues and friends in the academic world I express my thanks for a climate of scholarship and a community of concern.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS


Chapter I Introduction 1

The Problem 1

The Focus on the Reformation 10

The Limitation of the Focus Within Hermeneutics 17

The Method of the Research 22

Chapter II A Selective History of Hermeneutics before the Reformation 25

The Rabbis and Philo 27

Origen 39

The Antiochenes 51

Augustine 59

The Problem of Words and Things 102

Late Medieval Development 112

Review and Summary 135

Chapter III The Hermeneutics of Luther: Progress and Polemics 148

Personal History 148

Priest, Professor, Preacher 148

Discovery of the Gospel 152

Coram Deo: Luther and Paul 154

Theological and Hermeneutical Insights 158

Christocentric Emphasis 158

The Living Word Addresses Man 163

Man's Response to the Address of God 166

Living Word and the Life to Come 172

One Man against the Many 173

Intimations of Independence 175

Luther and the Church 177

Church Allegory 181

Clarification through Strife I
Latomus and Scholasticism 188

Clarification through Strife II
Erasmus and Humanism 194

Clarification through Strife III
The Schwärmer 220

Chapter IV The Hermeneutics of Melanchthon:
Progress and Polemics 242

Personal History 242

Clarification through Strife I 250

Clarification through Strife II 254

Clarification through Strife III 259

Summary and Prospect 265

Chapter V The Subjective Element - Constructive Statement.
The Heuristic Paradigm 268

Thesis 268

The Use of History 269

History and the Unique 273

History as Paradigm 274

Temporal Disjunction and Contemporaneity 276

God Gives Man History 279

Faith as Heuristic 282

The Proper Heuristic Function 287

Knowing Person as New Man 290

Knowing Person as Simul...Et 292

Heuristic History sub Contraria 298

Openness to the Future 301

Heuristic Function of Hope 303

Chapter VI Conclusion 312

Select Bibliography of Most-Used Works 326

# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

## The Problem

In every work of Biblical exposition a person, an individual, is involved. Every hermeneutical system must be applied and ultimately appraised by a person, by an individual. That individual person as the subject, the thinking agent, is a most important ingredient in any hermeneutical analysis. The following study is concerned to clarify the nature and function of the Christian believing individual in the context of the expository task.

The title of this thesis labels this segment of the problematic of hermeneutics as "the subjective element." The material immediately following in this introduction is a preliminary definition of the concept. All the following paragraphs should be viewed as a contribution to a more careful definition and delimitation of the subjective element.

The word "subjective" is held in low repute in theological circles. It conjures up a vision of the most biased non-objectivity, and the term will most often be used in its pejorative connotation. Since no more adequate term seemed ready to hand, the alternative was necessarily to be accepted, to refurbish the term in its present association and state an apologetic for its delimited connotations here.

## Allusive References to the Subjective Element

Our problem is complicated by the fact that there is an unexamined acceptance of the principle of a subjective element, or a tacit recognition which is never elucidated formally in many serious considerations of the hermeneutical problem. Thus, for example, Robert M. Grant can insist that interpretation has a subjective aspect:

> The interpretation of any written record of human thought is the exposition of its author's meaning in terms of our own thought forms. Though we may try to think his thought after him, ultimately our own mind must determine the way in which we express his meaning. Interpretation is always subjective as well as objective.[1]

Questioning the validity of contemporary interpretation, Professor Grant writes: "Is the fault not in our methods but in ourselves? Have we sacrificed imagination and faith for a somewhat illusory reputation as scientists?"[2]

Clearly, a wider range of cognates for "subjective" must be accepted in comprehending both the problem and the resolution. Grant's use of "faith" is an obvious and significant indication of a line of thought to be pursued. T. W. Manson incorporated faith in a complex of development of his perspective:

> The essential thing is that this kind of interpretation should be the product of deep spiritual insight which

---

[1]Robert M. Grant, The Bible in the Church (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1960), pp. 2-3.

[2]Grant, Bible in the Church, 4.

> starts from, and builds upon the plain meaning of the text. . . . In this field there is no substitute for sincere faith, intellectual integrity, and spiritual insight.[1]

Personal faith is implied and the faith of the church is explicit in H. Cunliffe-Jones' statement:

> The meaning of the conviction that Jesus is Lord is given by the Bible--but not by the Bible only but by the Bible as interpreted by a living faith. Great emphasis has been laid in recent years on the objective study and teaching of Christian truth. But this can only carry a limited way. At some point or other the Biblical evidence must be interpreted by a theological conviction, which arises out of the Biblical material, which sets it all in a new illumination, but is not strictly given by an objective study of the Bible, but by the Bible in the light of the present affirmation of faith by an obedient Church.[2]

Starting with New Testament references, Leonhard Goppelt moves to very modern "existence" terminology in supporting the same argument for the believing church as interpreter:

> The NT writings themselves assert that only he understands their message who accepts it as a believing member of the church and obeys it (Mark 4:11; John 7:16 f.; 2 Cor. 3:15f.). This claim is made not only because understanding is always conditioned on common experience, but because the center of the Scripture is the hidden self-disclosure of God. In other words, it is impossible first to try to establish historically what

---

[1]T. W. Manson, "The Failure of Liberalism to Interpret the Bible as the Word of God," The Interpretation of the Bible, ed. C. W. Dugmore (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1944), pp. 106-7.

[2]H. Cunliffe-Jones, The Authority of the Biblical Revelation (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1945), p. 112.

> is being said here, and then to demand believing acceptance of the message; because the only way to grasp the meaning of the text is to accept it as the message of God. This is possible only for those who have their existence within the church of Christ. It is therefore not accidental that in the final analysis the hermeneutical principles differ today according to the self-understanding of the churches to which the interpreters belong.[1]

The subjective element may well be scrutinized also under the more traditional heading of the work of the Holy Spirit on and in the believer. Regin Prenter's significant dissertation, Spiritus Creator,[2] setting forth an "objective" view of Luther's teachings on the Holy Spirit, contains also such a "subjective" passage as the section on Anfechtung experience.[3] In carefully guarded terms Gerhard Ebeling incorporates the problem of the Spirit's role in the problem of understanding:

> PNEUMA als Subjekt und Medium der Auslegung. Man kann das mit diesem Begriff gegebene weiterzweigte Problem kurz auf die Formel bringen: wie ein inspirierter Text durch einem inspirierten Ausleger andere inspiriert.[4]

---

[1]Leonhard Goppelt, "Bible Study," The Lutheran Encyclopedia, ed. Julius Boeensieck, I (1965), 243-4.

[2]Regin Prenter, Spiritus Creator: Studier i Luthers Teologi (2. udg.; København: Samlerens Forlag, 1946).

[3]Prenter, Spiritus, 213-17.

[4]Gerhard Ebeling, Evangelische Evangelienauslegung: Eine Untersuchung zu Luthers Hermeneutik ("Forschungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Protestanismus," herausgegeben von Ernst Wolf. 10.R. B.I.; München: Evangelischer Verlag Albert Lempp, 1942), p. 92.

> Die Offenbarung in der Verborgenheit wird gegenwärtig durch den heiligen Geist, welcher nicht neben dem Zeugnis als Hilfsmittel des Verstehens erst aus anderer Quelle hinzukommen muss, sondern der sich allein in dem Wort mitteilt, das er wiederum selbst erst mitteilt. Hier wird also im Gang unserer Untersuchung die Drage akut, inwiefern der heilige Geist Voraussetzung und Erfordernis zu "geistlicher" Auslegung ist. Es geht nicht um aufstellung subjektiver psychologischer Vorbedingungen, sondern um Aufhellung objektiver Bedingtheiten des Verstehens, wenn das Verstehen der Vernunft bestritten und dem Glauben allein zugesprochen wird und zwar dem Glauben, der in der Anfechtung zur Erfahrung kommt.[1]

The statements of conservative or fundamentalist Christians are far more likely to elicit the charge of subjectivity, but are legitimate matter for consideration. The adjectives "personal"and "spiritual" are key descriptions for their point of view. The statement of Bernard Ramm is in keeping with the American fundamentalist outlook and expression:

> Finally, what are the qualifications of a good interpreter? First are the spiritual qualifications. From the conservative Protestant standpoint this cannot be debated.... If the Bible is a spiritual book, then those most likely to apprehend its truth are spiritual people.[2]

The element of the personal is also evident in Cunliffe-Jones:

> For when we read the Bible as Christian believers we must not only acknowledge the personal claim, but we must also learn to write a personal

---

[1]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 375.

[2]Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics for Conservative Protestants (Boston: W. A. Wilde Co., 1960), p. 7.

> commentary. The commentary which we ourselves write--in life, and in words only as appropriated in life--is not a substitute for the public setting forth of the witness of the Bible to Jesus our Lord. But it is of the greatest importance to ourselves, because it is the measure of our real appropriation of the message which is the word of life to ourselves, and our hope as we face the future.[1]

It is only fair to permit Prof. Cunliffe-Jones to remove himself from the company of the radically conservative by quoting the summary statements of his book:

> For it is only when, by means of the constant interaction of the historical and theological study of the Bible, we gain a theological interpretation of the Bible which we can trust in its broad outlines as a means of putting us in the place where we can hear the living God, clothed in His Gospel, speaking to us, that we can truly understand and obey the authority of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in their testimony to Divine Revelation in Jesus Christ our Lord.[2]

"Where we can hear the living God. . . " is a clause reminding us sharply of the theological systems of the mid-twentieth century characterized by ideas of "encounter" or confrontation. It is inescapable in such systems that the hearing <u>person</u> be studied as the recipient of the revelation. So John Baillie asserts:

> We must remind ourselves again that revelation has place only within the relationship between the Holy Spirit of God and the individual human soul. Nothing is the vehicle of revelation for me unless I hear God Speaking to me through it. But there is

---

[1]Cunliffe-Jones, <u>Authority</u>, 117.

[2]Cunliffe-Jones, <u>Authority</u>, 118-9.

> no Christian who hears God speaking to him through every passage of the Bible. . . . Nevertheless it is always our duty to ask ourselves whether the defect may not be in ourselves rather than in the text, whether even here it is not we who are not willing to listen rather than that nothing significant is being said.[1]

Although Professor Baillie here moves quickly to a problem of the canon the emphasis on the responsibility of the individual hearer is integral to his thought and is not to be overlooked.

Very succinctly and with a vital imagery Emil Brunner sets a subjective element over against distant objectivity:

> You can't understand the cross of Christ without going there into the front line where God meets you. It cannot be understood objectively from the safe distance of objectivity.[2]

One final citation in this sequence will help to verify the claim that a subjective element is widely recognized, and further will delineate aspects of that subjective quality:

> Interpretations become <u>theological</u> exegesis by understanding the words of biblical writings as God's Word. This happens when the Word <u>personally hits the mark</u> for the reader or listener--and exegete, too. In order to understand the Bible one must not only discover what is meant, but also <u>who</u> was meant, namely none other than the reader and exegete himself. This readiness to know that I am meant is faith. In other words, the Bible is rightly interpreted as

---

[1]John Baillie, <u>The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought</u> (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 119.

[2]Emil Brunner, <u>Faith, Hope, and Love</u> (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 26-27.

> God's Word only when the exegete is ready to surrender himself to the Word who here speaks, which is to receive, in what he seeks to interpret, the judgment of God upon himself.[1]

From this range of citations it is evident that the problem of the subjective element in hermeneutics is directly related to the question of the nature of faith, the faith-life and the hearing of faith. If faith is a pre-condition of understanding, how does this faith operate in the work of exposition and what method is consonant with the faith-principle? And if, as Wilhelm Herrmann of Marburg said "we must already be renewed and redeemed by revelation before we can enter into the thought-world of Scripture,"[2] how is this special kind of hermeneutical circle to be entered?

## The Hazards of Subjectivity

The intensity of the problem is augmented by the self-evident hazards of unrestrained subjectivity. Is exposition to be guided by a kind of spiritual intuition only? Is the individualism of the subject to become a privatist, impregnable fortress? Is this matter of the subjective to be rejected as emotionalism, as irrational or anti-rational, as non-historical and non-objective? Terms such as these are

---

[1]Werner Elert, "The Authority of the Bible in the Church," The Lutheran Church Quarterly, XX, 4 (October, 1947), 416.

[2]Wilhelm Herrmann, Der Begriff der Offenbarung (1887); reprinted in Offenbarung und Wunder (Giessen: 1908), pp. 9f. Quoted in Baillie, The Idea of Revelation, 33.

employed not only as descriptive of the difficulties involved, but as allegations of improper procedures in the exposition of the Scripture. The words of caution of Cunliffe-Jones concerning the "perils of subjectivity"[1] are well-advised.

In a very perceptive passage, Henry S. Nash voices both a warning against subjectivity in the exegete, including the "critical" and suggests a corrective to the tendency:

> The task that lies ahead is the deep study of individual documents. This is all the more necessary because the wide gaps in our knowledge of the Apostolic Age make constructive synthesis as tempting as it is dangerous. The other great need is that the student shall be on guard against the personal equation. The critical individual of modern Christianity is not wholly competent to understand the men of the Bible, for whom religion was a superb passion and the corporate life instinctive. He needs also to remember that the distinction between metaphysics and religion, which has become a necessary element of thought, was wholly foreign to the men of the New Testament. The "critical" exegete may be, in some ways, quite as naive as the patristic exegete.[2]

Certain aspects of contemporary Lutheran problems of interpretation are evident in a set of lectures originally addressed to a predominantly Lutheran group of pastors. The published lectures constitute an apologetic for a new hermeneutical perspective, and contain

---

[1]Cunliffe-Jones, Authority, 94.

[2]Henry S. Nash, "Exegesis or Hermeneutics," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, IV (1958), 247.

the pejorative on subjectivity and a typically Lutheran use of the "letter" as corrective:

> In other words, without the letter, without that kind of understanding which biblical criticism has for its object, subjectivity, personal experience, theological exegesis--all run rampant.[1]

Although the delimitations of this thesis exclude a thorough constructive statement, it is apparent that part of the problem involved will be to imply or suggest at the very least some balancing factors, or correctives to the unwarranted subjectivity of interpretation. The concluding chapter will incorporate this application of the principles set forth in the body of the work.

## The Focus on the Reformation

The complexity of the subjective problem and all its implied ramifications defies simple solutions or the application of a methodological model derived from a historical personage or historical period. It would seem unwise to adduce either a person or an era as a major contribution to the resolution of the dilemma posed above, but this must nevertheless be essayed.

The unique position of the theology of the Reformation for every sector of the Christian Church, continuing to the present moment, is accepted without question. What is not so self-evident is the role of

---

[1]Roy A. Harrisville, His Hidden Grace: An Essay in Biblical Criticism (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 66.

the hermeneutics of the Reformation in bringing about the sweeping changes of the sixteenth century and in redirecting the Biblical exposition. This consensus is the basis for the selection of one segment of Reformation hermeneutics for this study. The underlying thesis is that as the theological presuppositions of the Reformers resulted in new systematic formulations, so those same presuppositions engendered a new hermeneutics.

This principle of coherence, involving an antecedent hermeneutical shift, is suggested by Bernard Ramm:

> Although historians admit that the West was ripe for the Reformation due to several impending forces, it nonetheless was a hermeneutical reformation before it was either theological or ecclesiastical.[1]

Gerhard Ebeling concurs in the judgment:

> One has realized that the primary impulse for reformation which originated in the quiet years of Luther's beginnings was a reform of academic studies and of the university under the sign of a new hermeneutics. This is the correct element in Karl Bauer's book on Die Wittenberger Universitätstheologie und die Anfänge der Deutschen Reformation (1928). . . . The growth of a new hermeneutics can already be noticed prior to the years 1516-1518 in the midst of the involvement in the traditional hermeneutics.[2]

## Luther and Melanchthon as Central Figures

The further limitation of the scope of this inquiry to the figures

---

[1]Ramm, Biblical Interpretation, 30.

[2]Gerhard Ebeling, "The New Hermeneutics and the Early Luther," Theology Today, XXI (April, 1964), 36.

of Luther and Melanchthon requires some preliminary justification. Ebeling makes a most significant transition from his declaration that the Reformation hermeneutics marks a turning-point /Einschnitt/ to immediate consideration of Luther's contribution. Even conceding a professional interest in Luther on Ebeling's part, his judgment is weighty.[1] In similar fashion, Robert M. Grant treats of the Bible and the Reformation and states, "Protestant interpretation. . . owes its life to the spirit of the Reformation,"[2] and proceeds to analyze the development more closely with the starting point "as we find it especially in the work of Martin Luther."[3]

The appraisal of Frederic W. Farrar is almost extravagant in praise of Luther over against the other contenders for exegetical laurels in the Reformation:

> God endows His chosen instruments with such gifts as they specially need. It required a personality far different from that of Erasmus to bring about that emancipation of Christendom from sacerdotal tyranny and false exegesis which was the essence of the Reformation. Revolutions have usually been wrought by men whose sympathies were all the more intense and concentrated from their very narrowness, not by men of delicate refinement and many-sided powers of appreciation. The genius of Erasmus, and the learning of Melanchthon, would have produced but

---

[1]G. Ebeling, "Hermeneutik," Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, ed. Hans Frhr. v. Campenhausen et al., 3. ed., Vol. III, p. 251.

[2]Grant, Bible in the Church, 109.

[3]Grant, Bible in the Church, 110.

> small results without the Titanic force of Luther, the sovereign good sense of Zwingli, the remorseless logic of Calvin;--and of these three the greatest was MARTIN LUTHER.[1]

In less oratorical style, Farrar points to the enduring quality of Luther's exegesis: "In his Prefaces and in all his other works he enunciated rules to which the complete revolution of exegetic methods in modern times has been principally due."[2]

Testimonies to the expository genius of Melanchthon are more difficult to accumulate, and his inclusion in this study may seem superfluous. Farrar makes only a few brief, scattered references to Master Philip, Grant does not mention him. Professor Ebeling stands in the same tradition when he makes only passing mention of him. Is he then, to be considered only a lowly foil to the commanding presence of Luther?

Several developments negate so harsh a judgment on Melanchthon. For over a decade there has been a strong resurgence of interest in the Preceptor of Germany, from a wide variety of perspectives; the bibliography of this thesis will reflect only too small a fraction of the total of new biographies and theological analyses. Under the general editorship of Robert Stupperich a very carefully edited Studienausgabe of Melanchthon's works, although a sharp abridgement,

---

[1]Frederic W. Farrar, History of Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), pp. 322-23.

[2]Farrar, History, 324.

has made primary materials available to scholars with less than a commanding interest in his writings. The twenty-eight volume of the Bretschneider Corpus Reformatorum which contained Melanchthon's works, long out of print, was reprinted in 1963.

Significantly, Melanchthon began to develop his own circle of hermeneutical analysts. The Stupperich circle formed one sector of the groups. Elsewhere, Hansjörg Sick, Lowell Green and Adolf Sperl gave attention to specifically hermeneutical questions.

But even more decisive, most decisive, is the evaluation of the oldest and most capable Melanchthon scholar of all: Martin Luther himself. If no subsequent theologian had said a commendatory word for Master Philip, if no one had bothered to search out from dusty and unused volumes the doctrinal and exegetical works of Melanchthon, then the task would still cry out to be done. Luther, too, could be extravagant in his praise, and he was--about Melanchthon. Luther knew that the reform of the Church, the pure teaching of the Word, must eventually pass to other hands than his, and he was content to see and groom the heir apparent to the role of leader--Melanchthon.

There is no escaping the fact that Luther stands as the dominant figure in our inquiry. The sheer fact of seniority in age, in academic position and in identification with the nascent reform movement places him in this position. From this point onward a long catena of questions arises: Just how and what did Melanchthon learn from Luther? How faithfully did he perpetuate the Reformation motifs?

How clearly did he perceive the delicate nuances of Luther's thoughts? How closely did his experience of the grace of Christ in the Gospel resemble that of Luther in his Copernican revolution of faith? From the special perspective of this enterprise perhaps some new light may yet be shed on these old questions.

Lest the ground seem to be rendered unproductive of fresh fruit because of the trampling of all the Luther researchers, some suggestion of need for this type of restudy should be submitted. Again we turn to Gerhard Ebeling for counsel:

> The hermeneutical revolution which occurred in Luther's thinking has been largely buried again even in the Protestant tradition and still hides within itself hermeneutical understanding which has not yet been unearthed.[1]

If some freshness of approach can be expected from the juxtaposition of the subjective with the hermeneutical problem, and of Luther and Melanchthon, we may also hope to fulfil some of the objective expressed by Joseph Sittler:

> The current search for a proper theological method is surely due to the fact that our generation finds older "Explanations" simply not clear, intelligible, or in just proportion. There is a "disharmony between traditional explanations and current needs." Statements of one period are "felt as fact" in virtue of their congruity with

---

[1]Ebeling, Theology Today, XXI, No. 1, 44.

> the spirit, practice, and basic assumptions of a time; they are not "felt as fact" by another period."[1]

That these two men will furnish material for the study of the problem of the subjective is assured in both cases. Many theologians declare that Luther's basic contribution to religious thought was the affirmation of the right of private judgment. Luther's insistence on the priesthood of all believers suggests an expository responsibility which somehow is universal to the rank and file of believers, thus in some degree minimizing technical skills in favor of a faith function. In the history of the Reformation, beginning most dramatically at the Diet of Worms, Luther was forced to stand solitary, confronted on all sides by the question, "Who are you to defy the Holy Church?" His consciousness of this challenge, and his resolute probing for a personal integrity in answering it, further indicates the centrality of the subjective element in his religious life and in his work.

Melanchthon was faced by the same questionings. Though his position seems in retrospect less dramatic, any biography must give a portrayal of an almost relentless attack on Melanchthon at the conference tables where he came to be more involved than Luther. Whether express or implicit, the question, "Who are you?" was never far from Melanchthon either. The common judgment that his exposition of Scripture was much more a matter of the head and less of the heart

---

[1]Joseph Sittler, The Ecology of Faith (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 20.

than was Luther's adds the spice of potential contrast to this research. The final judgment as to Melanchthon's objectivity or subjectivity should be deferred until more evidence is brought to bear.

The choice, on these grounds, of Luther and Melanchthon as prime case histories for hermeneutics does not imply a search for an ultimate contemporary model. The Reformation era is so complex, so vital, so decisive a period that it furnishes the broadest possible basis for inquiry. Therefore, a consideration of the problems and terminology of that period may give, if not a norm, at the least valuable examples and illustrations of hermeneutical perspectives and may provoke some highly profitable and creative thought for the analysis of contemporary methods of Biblical exposition.

## The Limitation of the Focus Within Hermeneutics

Certain lines of inquiry, validly related to an analysis of the methods of interpretation, must be scrutinized as to the propriety of their inclusion in this project. These lines concern metaphysics or the philosophy of religion, epistemology, the scope of exegesis, and general hermeneutics over against special or Biblical hermeneutics.

None of the above topics can be rigidly excluded from a study such as this one. Questions of metaphysics and epistemology become valuable analytical probes. Exegesis and general hermeneutics have a close relationship to special hermeneutics, but distinctions must then be drawn as to their unique definitions and spheres.

In the present state of scholarly work in hermeneutics, it is almost commonplace to see metaphysical presuppositions set forth as essential to the analysis of understanding. Thus the close nexus between the thought of Heidegger and the New Testament work of Bultmann is at issue in much of the "new hermeneutic." The effect of such a coordination is either to pervert historical studies by marshalling invalid norms, invalid because they do not relate to the time of the object of study, or to transpose the problem into an area which is only preliminary to the Biblical hermeneutical problem. Both of these alternatives, hopefully, may be avoided by attempting to involve metaphysical questions only as subsequent, incidental questions of analysis of conclusions. The Platonism or neo-Platonism or existentialism of the reformers may be of some significance to their hermeneutical views, but it is not the business of this inquiry to decide just which "ism" best describes the presuppositions under which they operated.

The rejection of this area of inquiry as a primary concern may appear arbitrary and subjective. However, a stronger case can be made against the proponents of a metaphysical, philosophy of religion view. Gustaf Aulén does precisely this in the introduction to his dogmatics.[1] The attempt must be made to understand the faith and its

---

[1]Gustaf Aulén, The Faith of the Christian Church, trans. Eric Wahlstrom (2d. Eng. ed.; Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1962), pp. 7ff.

workings from within, even though analysis will reveal the latent metaphysic under which every man operates, which metaphysic he may have absorbed unconsciously from his cultural environment.

The perspective of fides quaerens intellectum supplants metaphysical schemata with doctrines of God, of creation, of man and of history. In like manner, philosophical considerations on the possibilities of knowing are supplanted by the doctrine of the enlightenment of man by the Holy Spirit through the Word. Thus the tedious, endless and unconvincing debate about the possibility of revelation and of man's grasping the revealed is obviated. The long consensus in the Church of this general principle of the knowability of God cancels the accusation that the rejection of the niceties of epistemology as normative is a bravado piece of Gordian knot-cutting. Inquiries into the nature of language, of speech, must also be subsumed under the head of epistemology. Some of the studies in this area may certainly be accepted as ancillary and may give a fresh analytical perspective, but conclusions drawn thereby may hardly be applied absolutely to the sixteenth century.

Exegesis, as the process of interpreting a text, precedes hermeneutics as practice precedes theory. Exegeted materials must be the data for a historical study of hermeneutics. Once the range of permissible exegetical procedures has been conceded in principle, the precise operation and development of skills is not the concern of a hermeneutical study. Questions of the canon, of textual variants, of

linguistic problems relate to hermeneutics only if these problems reveal uniquely an express or an unexamined hermeneutical principle.

The problem of the distinction between general and special or Biblical hermeneutics is not easily drawn with precision. The post-Renaissance Western world has absorbed much of the literary criticism which characterized the great cultural movement of Renaissance Humanism. The Bible moved into the wider field of world literature, and was subjected to literary scrutiny qua literature. The higher criticism of the Scripture openly acknowledged its indebtedness to literary analysis. Some of our present confusion may stem from a confusion of exegesis and hermeneutics, a confusion which has not been clarified by distinctions such as are set forth in the preceding paragraph.

The perspective accepted as a working basis for this study is that there is a proper distinction between general hermeneutical principles and Biblical. The following statement from the Catholic Encyclopedia may be incomplete and dogmatic, but it does make the essential point of distinctiveness: "The sacred character of the Bible demands additional rules of interpretation which are not applicable to profane writings."[1] This separation does not deny the possibility of significant contributions to the understanding of Biblical literature from the application of general literary hermeneutics. Some considerations of subjectivity in reading literature are also found in purely

---

[1]A. J. Maas, "Hermeneutics," Catholic Encyclopedia, ed. Charles G. Herbermann et al., VII, 1908, 271.

literary analyses.[1]

The reluctance to make a sharper distinction between general and Biblical hermeneutics may stem from a lack of appreciation of the penultimate character of literature. A personal comment of Ernst Fuchs seems germane to this argument. In the course of the first Consultation on Hermeneutics at Drew University in 1962, there had been much discussion of such literary giants as Hölderlin and Rilke and the American Robert Frost. Queried about his earlier interest in the German poets, Fuchs commented in the hearing of this writer, "All that is past. Now I only try to understand what the New Testament says."

The foregoing delimitation of the problem areas is not an attempt at a simplicist reduction of the problem. A. J. Maas correctly writes "Hermeneutics does not supply a deficiency of natural ability, nor does it rectify false philosophical principles or perverse passions."[2] There is no denying of the complexity also of a Biblical hermeneutic, there is only a stronger affirmation that this complexity is singular and unique to this special area.

---

[1]Paul Valery, quoted on p. 37, W. H. Auden, The Dyer's Hand (New York: Random House, 1962) : "One only reads well that which one reads with some quite personal purpose. It may be to acquire some power. It can be out of hatred for the author."

[2]Catholic Encyclopedia, VII, 271.

## The Method for the Research

The delimitations sketched above have been largely negative in character. Stated positively, the method involves historical and systematic development and appraisal. This betokens first descriptive, then critical statement.

Since Reformation studies are so frequently charged with denominational and theological bias, and a problem involving subjectivity demands an even greater effort for objectivity, the approach by historical study is of the greatest importance. This method is urged by Prenter[1] and Wingren.[2] Uuras Saarnivaara emphasizes the genetic factor in the history: "The new Luther-study proceeds according to a historico-genetic method, paying particular attention to Luther's spiritual and theological development."[3]

The data for such a historical study are manifold. The contingent biographical factors of economic and sociological status, of education and spiritual development are not to be underestimated. The relationship of hermeneutics to exegesis as drawn above demands the prime use of exegetical writings. Some specific statements on the

---

[1]Prenter, Spiritus, pp. 11 ff.

[2]Gustaf Wingren, Theology in Conflict: Nygren--Barth--Bultmann, trans. Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), pp. 150 ff., passim.

[3]Uuras Saarnivaara, "Some Questions concerning Recent Luther Research," The Lutheran Quarterly, I (February, 1949), 92.

special aspect of the hermeneutical problem must be adduced, but allusions and implications which only suggest support for this project's thesis must also be accepted in evidence. Direct statements of hermeneutical principle from Luther and Melanchthon, together with their statements in systematic and polemic declarations which have a bearing on the topic,are also historical data. From secondary sources, that is, from other scholars, another level of statements may be drawn having historical significance.

To introduce systematic considerations at this point in the method is not to relegate systematics to a secondary role because of the sequence, nor exalt it to a primary role because of the critical function. Tests must be made of the conclusions from history and by history. Some of these questions, obviously of a systematic character, are: Are these conclusions consistent with the data adduced and with the total theological position of Luther and Melanchthon? Is there a coherence of thought which admits these conclusions into the totality, or are the conclusions suspect as deviating from fully developed and self-conscious theological statements of the reformers?

Inescapably, such a systematic evaluation becomes affected by the writer's history, the history of the twentieth century. No study of the ways of thought of the sixteenth century, or some mysterious mental time machine can eradicate the time differential. The "new hermeneutic" has raised questions never anticipated in the sixteenth

century; historiography has asked more penetrating questions of the nature of human existence in history; studies in eschatology since the Reformation have raised issues and suggested alternatives far removed from the specter of the Turks at the gates of Vienna. Insofar as these developments enhance an understanding of systematic questions they are admissible to method, insofar as they threaten to read back into a by-gone era factors that did not operate at that time, they are to be handled with the greatest caution and safeguards against anachronistic judgments.

Somewhat the same difficulty is involved in the irresistible urge to make some kind of translation of the hermeneutical principles of Luther and Melanchthon to this present age. In a time of ecumenical dialogue, it would be fascinating to adduce the words of the Reformers in the Roman Catholic--Protestant dialogue on the nature of the Scripture and its interpretation. It would be for many a superb achievement to be able to judge the Lutheranism or non-Lutheranism of the Bultmannites and post-Bultmannites, from the ipsissima verba of Luther and Melanchthon. Here again, while the temptation will be irresistible to attempt some brief, hopefully provocative, applications of the conclusions to contemporary issues in hermeneutics, the writer will be the first to recognize the tentative character of such attempts to suggest today's norms in terms of yesterday's history.

# CHAPTER II

## A SELECTIVE HISTORY OF HERMENEUTICS BEFORE THE REFORMATION

Since Luther and Melanchthon were both historically-minded and historically-oriented it is proper to study carefully their historical backgrounds. Their common belief in the primacy of Scripture drove them back to the ancient record of the Old and New Testaments. Luther taught Peter Lombard's Sentences, was intrigued by the Mystics of the Church, came to regard Augustine very highly, and like other interpreters of his day, employed the existing traditional glosses and scholia on the Scripture. Out of his Humanist background, Melanchthon accepted the programmatic ad fontes, and perhaps more self-consciously consulted the works of his predecessors in interpretation.

In order to avoid repeated disruption in the continuity of the major argument by lengthy historical sections, this chapter of selective history is inserted to set a fuller background to the sixteenth century hermeneutics. It is intentionally selective in terms of the persons and the motifs set forth. The choices have been made on the basis of those topics most precisely related to the discussion following.

The range of groups or individuals selected includes: Jewish interpreters, Philo, the Alexandrian as over against the Antiochene tradition, Origen, Augustine of Hippo, Nicholas of Lyra, Gabriel Biel, and Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples. The motifs developed, necessarily

varied because of the differences of emphasis in the interpreters dealt with, are the nature and working of faith in the interpretation, with its corollary in evidences of subjectivity in interpretation; the role of the individual as related to the community of the believers; and the development of the four-fold sense of Scripture.

In a sense, if we were to examine the totality of Christian hermeneutical history, we should begin with the New Testament writers' interpretation of the Old Testament materials. How did the apostle Paul most self-consciously and critically interpret the message of the Scriptures in which he had been instructed from his youth? How did the other writers of the New Testament canon relate the material and relate to the corpus of the Old Testament? We pass by such questions because pragmatically the interpreters we are studying demonstrate their principles of interpretation on an already accepted Biblical canon.

It is, nevertheless, essential to clarify two points lying as presuppositions to our historical and descriptive inquiry throughout the ensuing pages, whether set forth in precise terms or not. These two presuppositions are: 1. It was the interpretation of the Old Testament Scripture by the New Testament writers which determined and defined what the Christian faith was and was to continue to be. 2. This Christian faith was Christocentric. That is, further, there was not only recorded the appearance of a Messiah, but there was an Incarnation. This incarnation said something precisely about the nature of the world and of history, about man in his nature, about man

and his salvation, about man and his knowledge of God. All subsequent Biblical interpretation stands under the judgment of this Christocentricity.[1]

## The Rabbis and Philo

In view of the emphasis, particularly the contemporary emphasis, on the excellence of Hebraic thought modes in juxtaposition with Hellenic thought-forms, we might expect some quite meaningful exemplars to stem from Jewish Biblical interpretation. It is self-evident that the Jewish Christians, like Paul, who contributed to the New Testament corpus, give evidence of this excellence, but we have declined methodologically to deal with this material. There is, of course, within the pages of the New Testament a great deal of dialogue based on the conflicts of interpretations of the Scriptures. The early sermons in Acts and the confrontations of the apostles with Jews in the Temple and in the synagogues are illustrative. Typically, it is the Christ as the rock of offense who opens the cleft; He can not be seen in relation to the Old Testament, hence He and the presumptive kingdom are to be rejected.

An analysis of the interpretation by the later rabbis of the Scripture as canonized by the Christian community would be more

---

[1]E. G. Ignatius vs. Gnostic Judaism as summarized by Jean Daniélou, The Theology of Jewish Christianity, tr. and ed. John A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), p. 40.

specialized than we could here attempt. Besides the technical factors of knowledge of languages and texts which would be required there are the significant variants of time and place and of differing theological positions among the rabbis which make such a study too formidable. As Solomon Schechter says, "Whatever the faults of the Rabbis were, consistency was not one of them."[1] Our judgments, then, must inevitably be both incomplete and faulty since we are left to the alternative of generalization.

Millar Burrows conforms to our expectations in his statement of typical themes in Israel's view of her history: "In human history the one, eternal, living God is working out his own sovereign purpose for the good of his creatures. The purpose of God is a moral purpose."[2] However, the emphasis on the moral aspect deteriorates into the petty strictures which are certainly a part, even if not the whole, of rabbinic interpretation. The Pauline judgment on works is undoubtedly a consequence of this tendency.

The premise that "God is working" was assumed in Judaism to the extent that it did not require self-conscious examination among the Jews where tradition was strong. There it assumed the character

---

[1]Solomon Schechter, Aspects of Rabbinic Theology (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 46.

[2]Millar Burrows, Ancient Israel, The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East (American Oriental Series, Vol. 38, Henry M. Hoenigswald, ed., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), pp. 128-130.

of doctrine. On this presupposition cosmology and anthropology took on a strong character of realism, as J. Pedersen maintains. The world and history were accepted for what they are, man was seen as a totality. This is evident, but not self-evident, in the descriptive designation of man as soul.[1] That ambiguous word does not there mean what it subsequently was given to mean in Platonism, Neo-Platonism or Philonism. The soul was the totality of man, such that thinking, willing and doing were all related to it explicitly.[2] Here there is no dichotomy nor trichotomy, nor is thinking considered a theoretical functioning. In spite of the qualification which Thorleif Boman makes to guard against an over-Platonizing analysis of Hebrew thought he goes too far in his claim that a Platonic Idea concept is latent in Hebraic thought and in Pedersen's analysis of the soul.[3]

The application of doctrine to life required some very special exegesis. The written law was divinely revealed and every word, every letter, was significant. By a systematic, logical process the implications of this unchangeable law could be extracted to resolve the dilemmas of moral decision posed by changing situations both in

---

[1]Johs. Pedersen, Israel: Its Life and Culture, 4 vols. (Oxford: Geoffrey Cummerlege, Oxford University Press, 1926) I, p. 100.

[2]Pedersen, Israel, I, 99-110.

[3]Thorleif Boman, Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek, tr. J. Moreau (The Library of History and Doctrine; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 67-73.

the homeland and in the Diaspora. Hillel, who came out of a Babylonian background,developed his seven hermeneutical rules to effect this juristic exegesis.[1] The application of these and other rabbinic rules often seems puerile to us, drawing as they may in extreme instances upon the trivia of grammar, spellings, etymologies, even punctuation. The principles are applied with forbidding legalism to questions which seem pure casuistry.

In spite of this threat to vitality, rabbinic interpreters found in the Scripture a "living letter"[2] which gave to the Jews moral strength, resistance to persecution, preservation of the family, in other words, tropologically, the letter mediated the power of the Scripture.[3] The religious spirit of the interpreter evidently transcended the strict letter of his method.

The view of history and of man's role in history is more fundamental to our inquiry and of prime importance in appraising the nature of rabbinic exposition of Scripture, including the appraisal of the possibility or probability of the incarnation as divine activity.

---

[1]George Foot Moore, Judaism: In the first Centuries of the Christian Era--the Age of the Tannaim , 3 Vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962) I, pp. 77-78. For Hillel's rules, v. Hermann L. Strack, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash, tr. n. n. (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), pp. 93-94.

[2]Joseph Klaussner, From Jesus to Paul, tr. William F. Stinespring (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1945), p. 603.

[3]Strack, Introduction, 98.

Joseph Klaussner's assertion that there is in Judaism "such faith in life and such strong optimism"[1] has a noble ring to it. That ring is negated, however, by other statements which can imply only that man is responsible as an individual isolate, and that his apocalyptic hope is not to be fulfilled within history.[2]

As to the isolation of the individual into private responsibility, Schechter cites that most prestigious ancient rabbi, Hillel "who said, 'If I am not for myself, who is for me, and being for myself, what am I?' which is explained to mean, 'I must work out my own salvation, yet how weak are my unaided efforts!' "[3] We see Joseph Klaussner as a twentieth century counterpart of the Hillel type of viewpoint. Although Klaussner's analysis in From Jesus to Paul seems a curiously biased and tortuous interpretation of New Testament materials we recognize that he manifests a masterly awareness of the data which he combines with his thoroughly Jewish position. Klaussner rules out the possibility of a universal atonement including the redemption of nature by the Christ-Messiah, and again exalts the unfettered human spirit and the "joy in living and the potent energies of man aspiring to greatness."[4] One might well paraphrase this kind of statement to suggest that the

---

[1]Klaussner, From Jesus to Paul, 525.

[2]Burrows, Ancient Israel, 130.

[3]Schechter, Rabbinic Theology, 182-3.

[4]Klaussner, From Jesus to Paul, 526-7.

redemptive work, the Messianic work will be done on this earth, in this history, by pious man himself, or it will not be done at all.

Before proceeding to the next point in this historical overview, we may well consider a sub-thesis which seems to have validity. It is already evident that the issues we are describing have been studied over against alternatives, that the statements have been at times highly apologetic, at other times strongly polemical. The inescapable exemplars of hermeneutical development are those rising out of dramatic confrontations with Jews, or pagans, or ultimately with other Christians informed by opposing presuppositions. Thus we move naturally first to the apologetic position of Philo.

## Philo

Although he was a Jew and wrote as a Jewish apologist, Philo made a remarkable impression on Christian exegesis. We may ascribe to him the initiation of the allegorical interpretation which found its Christian expression in Origen. Other lesser expositors learned from him even before the time of Origen. The dominance of allegorical method in the following centuries, and the pointed attacks of the reformers against the method, make Philo a central, though suspicious, figure in this brief history.

Sensitive to the criticism of the Jews in Alexandria, particularly that of the officious Romans, Philo attempted to prove that "the insights of Judaism, properly understood, do not differ from the highest

insights of Greek philosophy. God revealed himself to the chosen people of Israel, but he revealed himself in no radically different way from the way in which he revealed himself to the Greeks."[1] In a sense, then, Philo and Paul are apostles to the Gentiles, although they differ ultimately from one another, and both differ from the rabbinic exegesis.[2]

It would be a mistake to consider Philo merely an eclectic or an imitator. He is indebted to Heraclitus, to the Stoics, and above all, to Plato. Klaussner makes a strong case for his originality by the working in of elements from Judaism.[3] We must note here that all of Philo's antecedents, both Jewish and Hellenistic, were familiar with allegorical interpretation and gave unusual place to the method. Philo adapted and developed the tradition.

Allegory before Plato may have had more of a positive rather than an apologetic character.[4] The defence of the Homeric materials over against the charge of immorality or denigration of the gods was accomplished by allegory, but even more there was widespread use of the method to arrive at moral or tropological conclusions, for the

---

[1]Grant, Bible in the Church, 52.

[2]Grant, Bible in the Church, 30.

[3]Klaussner, From Jesus to Paul, 181.

[4]J. Tate, "Plato and Allegorical Interpretation," Classical Quarterly, XXIII, (July-October, 1929), 142.

upbuilding of virtue.[1] The Stoics and other philosophers may have used allegory, and we may construe this as an abuse, in order to find sanction for their ideas in accepted and highly regarded literature.[2] Such uses clearly indicate that the mode of interpretation might be determined by presuppositions either examined or unexamined.

Plato's use of allegory, while it was certainly not central to his method, was derivative from his primary understandings of the universe. For Plato, understanding came through dialectice, through discursive reasoning.[3] Granted that poets had obviously stated some truths, but had not arrived at those truths dialectically, some explanation must be made for the phenomenon. The poet did not himself know the intention of his thought.[4] This non-historical writing must have been the result of direct inspiration and could be understood not by rational analysis, but by allegorizing only, and even then one might not be sure of the correctness of the interpretation. As we shall mention shortly, Philo went beyond Plato in his confidence in the potential validity of allegory, but the major emphasis here as Daniélou says, is that "the work of Philo exhibits the first attempt to apply to

---

[1]Tate, Classical Quarterly, XXIII, Nos. 3, 4, 145.

[2]Tate, Classical Quarterly, XXIII, Nos. 3, 4, 144.

[3]J. Tate, "On the History of Allegorism," Classical Quarterly, XXVIII, (April, 1934), 114.

[4]Tate, Classical Quarterly, XXIII, Nos. 3, 4, 149.

Scripture the exegetical methods of Hellenism."[1]

Plato's difficulty with the truths taught by poets is analogous to Philo's dilemma over against an inspired, authoritative, but non-dialectical Scripture. His problem was further complicated by his Jewish concept of God, as Klaussner points out:

> Also, the question of contact between deity--pure spirituality--and impure matter is for a monotheistic Jew a more difficult question than it is for a Greek philosopher, whose monotheism is a theoretical principle of existence and not a principle of life (a "living God"--fashioner and creator, "the first and the last"--the God of society and the God of history.)[2]

Philo resolved the problem by developing the idea of mediators: the Logos, his angelology, the Powers, Wisdom and the like. Klaussner sees this method as avoiding the hazards of "corporealism" which was associated in his mind with the later Christian "corporealizing" of Philo's Logos into the Christ of the Christians.[3] Through Sophia as the Hodos the way leads from the cosmos to the heavenly world.[4] Klaussner's conclusion is couched in more typically

---

[1]Daniélou, Theology of Jewish Christianity, 87.

[2]Klaussner, From Jesus to Paul, 182.

[3]Klaussner, From Jesus to Paul, 183, 184, 188.

[4]Sidney G. Sowers, The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews : A Comparison of the Interpretation of the Old Testament in Philo Judaeus and the Epistle to the Hebrews, (Basel Studies of Theology, ed. the Faculty of Theology, Basel, No. 1; Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1965), p. 108.

mystical language of "rapture" and "ecstasy" which is further seen as typical Jewish mysticism.[1]

Just as allegory from its earliest beginning had posited a new cosmology[2] so Philo interpreted the book of Genesis as a cosmogony, not a history.[3] The predilection for this problem of the nature of creation and the nature of nature, as well as the disproportionate interest in the book of Genesis, is illustrative of the continuing central concerns of the allegorists. In the world thus seen, sense, as a lower human function, is limited in terms of ability to apprehend not only Being, but also past and future. Thus Philo writes in the Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis ii:

> Perception by itself is now, subsisting only in relation to the present time. For whereas past, present, and future are within the scope of the mind, as it grasps things present, remembers things past, and looks forward to things future, perception, on the other hand, has no power either to reach out to future things by experiencing something corresponding to hope or expectation, nor does it remember things past, but it is so constituted as to be affected only by that which is present and sets it in motion at the moment....[4]

---

[1]Klaussner, From Jesus to Paul, 96.

[2]J. Tate, "The Beginnings of Greek Allegory," Classical Review, XLI, (December, 1927), 215.

[3]Philo, Works, F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, 10 Vols. (Loeb Classical Library; London: Wm. Heinemann Ltd.), I, 1929-62, p. 2, 7.

[4]Philo, Works, I, 251.

In such a cosmos discursive reason has lost its primacy to that strange and indefinable mind or spirit or whatever it variously is designated, which alone can rise to the knowledge of ultimate truths. Were it not for gifts of grace promised in the enterprise of knowing truth and doing good[1] (a doctrine not unlike that of Plato concerning poets' reception of right doctrines through the Graces[2]) one sees little hope for any clarity or authority in such understanding.

Philo is not to be turned aside, however. Plato had been willing to treat both objectionable and unobjectionable passages allegorically[3] but Philo sees the spiritual sense in all of the Scripture, so it is all to be understood allegorically.[4] Surely this is the most dynamic element in Philo, the element which was to dominate exegesis for hundreds of years. Plato could be quizzical, even skeptical, about allegory,[5] Philo urged a programmatic consistency. Although Miss

---

[1]Klaussner, From Jesus to Paul, 190.

[2]Tate, Classical Quarterly, XXIII, Nos. 3, 4, 148. For Philo's understanding of "grace", especially his hypostatising of the concept, v. Thomas F. Torrance, The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), pp. 6-10.

[3]Tate, Classical Quarterly, XXIII, Nos. 3, 4, 146-47.

[4]Jean Daniélou, Origen, trans. Walter Mitchell (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p. 183.

[5]Tate, Classical Quarterly, XXIII, Nos. 3, 4, 154.

Smalley's allegation of "fantasy" in the following paragraph is marvellously well taken, the thirteenth century was not the final end of Philonic influence.

> At some time in the thirteenth century commentators step back 'through the looking-glass', out of their world of reflections into everyday life. The first impulse seems to come from religious experience. We can see the Philo tradition losing its appeal, and collapsing into sheer fantasy, even before Maimonides and Aristotle supplant and discredit it. The scholars rationalize and hasten something which is already happening. The 'letter' of Scripture has captured not only their reason but their affection too.[1]

This dominance in the realm of exegesis parallels Philo's influence in philosophy. H. A. Wolfson considers the next seventeen centuries the age of Philo, and contends that nothing new happened in philosophy until Spinoza tried to free philosophy from Scripture.[2] The philosophers' problem of knowledge had become the problem of the knowledge of the revealed Scripture and the problem of the relationship of knowledge and faith.[3]

In a seminal paragraph Wolfson analyzes the development out of Philo in terms which sharpen our theological perspective on the ensuing centuries:

---

[1]Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), p. 308.

[2]Harry Austryn Wolfson, Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, 2 Vols., (Structure and Growth of Philosophical Systems from Plato to Spinoza; Third printing, rev.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), II, 459-60.

[3]Wolfson, Philo, I, 152-58.

> Three different views appeared in each of these three religious philosophies--Christian, Moslem, Jewish with regard to the relation between philosophy and Scripture--views which expressed themselves in the form of three distinct definitions of faith. There was a double-faith theory, according to which true faith is either assent to Scripture without the aid of philosophy or assent to Scripture with the aid of philosophy. There was a single-faith theory of the rationalist type, according to which true faith is the assent to Scripture with the aid of philosophy. There was also a single-faith theory of the authoritarian type, according to which true faith is assent to Scripture without the aid of philosophy. According to all these conceptions of faith, even the double-faith theory and the single-faith theory of the rationalist type, Scripture is still the mistress and philosophy the handmaid.[1]

In view of the preceding testimonies, Philo's influence on the exegetes of the church must be assumed, even where it is not so specified. It will be our concern to indicate extremes of servility or independence and notable borrowings rather than the usual acceptance of Philonic presuppositions.

## Origen

The affinities between Philo and Origen are more than symbolized in their common origins from Alexandria. Philo was a part of the Jewish Diaspora, Origen was a part of that growing Christian community outside Palestine and in constant contact with the Hellenistic world of thought. Miss Smalley writes:

---

[1]Wolfson, Philo, I, 156.

> It was natural that towards the end of this century and beginning of the next Alexandria should become a point of fusion for Christian and Philonic exegesis. We can see the process at work in Origen, who praised Philo, while regarding himself as a disciple and continuator of St. Paul; he combated and borrowed from both Jewish rabbis and gnostic heretics.[1]

Anders Nygren ascribes to Origen a central role in the establishment of Alexandrian theology and holds him responsible for incorporating the Eros motif, as a Hellenizing factor, into Christian theology, which says substantively what other interpreters say methodologically about Origen's relation to Heilenistic thought.[2]

The difficulty of establishing a consensus on the underlying viewpoints of Origen is indicated already in Milburn's statement that "Origen, at any rate, chose St. Paul rather than Philo as the justification for his allegorizings."[3] Daniélou, in his major work on Origen, makes clear that we must start with the figure of the apostle and missionary who uses philosophy to communicate with his time, in other words, to form an apologetic.[4]

---

[1]Smalley, Study of the Bible, 6.

[2]Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros, tr. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminister Press, 1953), p. 253.

[3]R. L. P. Milburn, Early Christian Interpretations of History, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), p. 45.

[4]Jean Daniélou, Origen, trans. Walter Mitchell (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p. 73.

Origen confirms this understanding in the opening lines of the De Principiis:

> Since, in our investigation of matters of such importance, not satisfied with the common opinions, and with the clear evidence of visible things, we take in addition, for the proof of our statements, testimonies from what are believed by us to be divine writings, viz., from that which is called the Old Testament, and that which is styled the New, and endeavour by reason to confirm our faith...[1]

In carrying out this program it must be admitted that Origen was guided by a "churchly instinct" as Ebeling puts it[2] and that he was cognizant of the Rule of Faith. In the Preface of De Principiis we read:

> Seeing there are many who think they hold the opinions of Christ, and yet some of these think differently from their predecessors, yet as the teaching of the Church, transmitted in orderly succession from the apostles, and remaining in the Churches to the present day, is still preserved, that alone is to be accepted as truth which differs in no respect from ecclesiastical and apostolical tradition.[3]

Daniélou again asserts adamantly that Origen never lost hold of the rule of faith.[4] The subsequent conflict of opinions as to Origen's orthodoxy must be judged in light of the task he set himself. Since

---

[1]Origen, Works, Vol. IV, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1890), p. 349.

[2]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 117.

[3]Origen, Works, IV, 239.

[4]Daniélou, Origen, IV, 8.

the Rule had not said everything, and there were significant questions being asked, Origen wished to go on to make tentative answers to theological questions which ought to be answered.[1] On these uncharted ways he encountered heresy charges.

Origen's contribution to theology was notable in the application of his competence to hermeneutical problems. His De Principiis contains much of theory, and Contra Celsum much of application. There is such a close relationship of the parts of the central concept that a neat separation into outline form is virtually impossible. Ebeling has suggested a division which is adequate to our use and we shall pursue our analysis under the three headings he employs.[2]

Origen views the whole Scripture as a teaching of law, thus placing it in a rationalized, de-historicized Mystery-concept. The legal concept is underscored in relating Moses and Jesus Christ as legislators[3] bringing "saving doctrine." The result of faith is the moral improvement of man, "to have become reformed and improved in their habits, through the belief that men are chastised for sins, and honoured for good works."[4] The emphasis on this element led Hal Koch

---

[1]v. R. A. Norris, Jr., God and World in Early Christian Theology (New York: The Seabury Press, 1965), p. 140.

[2]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 113-17.

[3]Origen, Works, N, 349.

[4]Origen, Works, N, 400.

to characterize Origen's theology as a "pedagogical idealism."[1] Niebuhr analyzes Origen's doctrine of salvation as a typical Hellenizing, Alexandrian bridging of the chasm between created and Uncreated by knowledge.[2]

The end of this knowledge is contemplation, comprehension of the mysteries.[3] Here is the Christian mystic's view of God, notably not a hearing of the Word of God in the world, but a seeing, a point which will have considerable importance in our later analyses.[4]

The entire Scripture, Origen asserts not only as his personal judgment but as the conviction of the Church, is a mystery with a spiritual meaning:

> That the Scriptures were written by the Spirit of God, and have a meaning, not such only as is apparent at first sight, but also another, which escapes the notice of most. For those (words) which are written are the forms of certain mysteries, and the images of divine things. Respecting which there is one opinion throughout the whole Church, that the whole law is indeed spiritual; but that the spiritual meaning which the law conveys is not known to all.[5]

---

[1]Commented on in Nygren, Agape and Eros, 386, n. 3.

[2]Reinhold Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny of Man, 2 Vols., (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), II, p. 58.

[3]Norris, God and World, 133, 137.

[4]Smalley, Study of the Bible, 1.

[5]Origen, Works, IV, 241.

And again:

> For, with respect to holy Scripture, our opinion is that the whole of it has a "spiritual," but not the whole a "bodily" meaning, because the bodily meaning is in many places proved to be impossible.[1]

In the breadth of these statements his relation to Philo is self-evident.

The result of this spiritualizing is to de-historicize, to deny the validity of history except as a point of connection for the spiritual.[2] The phraseology chosen by analysts varies within a narrow range from Patterson, "widening even further the gulf separating the methods and materials of historia from the study of the true actions of God in behalf of his creatures"[3] to Milburn's judgment that Origen edges away from the claim that God makes use of historical events.[4] To consider both nature and history sacramental, as Milburn does, admittedly leaves unresolved the problem that the "precise relationship between objective facts and the faith which transfigures is not easily expressed in the clear-cut formulae of logic."[5] But, as Nygren points out, when Origen conceives of the creation as existing for penal

---

[1]Origen, Works, IV, 369.

[2]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 113, 114.

[3]L. G. Patterson, God and History in Early Christian Thought, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967), p. 55.

[4]Milburn, Early Christian Interpretations, 47.

[5]Milburn, Early Christian Interpretations, 53. cf. Smalley, Study of the Bible, 7.

purposes, an atonement in history can have no real meaning.[1] The efforts of Origen to concede a value to history and preserve his presupposition of the spiritual nature of the Scripture, without conceding too much to the Gnostics, requires at times what Ebeling aptly terms "ein genialer Gedankensprung."[2]

Origen's concept of the nature of "flesh" is Ebeling's second division. Following Plato's ideas, man is seen to be composed of three parts, body, soul and spirit. Scripture parallels this trichotomy:

> For as man consists of body, and soul, and spirit, so in the same way does Scripture, which has been arranged to be given by God for the salvation of men.[3]

This basic statement is construed more explicitly:

> Since then Scripture itself also consists as it were of a visible body, and of the soul in it that is perceived and understood, and of the spirit which is according to the patterns and shadow of the heavenly things--come, let us call on Him who made for Scripture body and soul and spirit, a body for them that came before us, a soul for us, and a spirit for them that in the age to come shall inherit life eternal, and shall attain to the heavenly and true things of the law; and so let us for the present search not the letter but the soul. And if we are able, we shall ascend also to the spirit, in our account of the sacrifices whereof we have just read.[4]

---

[1]Nygren, Agape and Eros, 385.

[2]Ebeling, Ev. Evang.,114.

[3]Origen, Works, IV, 359.

[4]Origen, Selections, Selections from Early Writers: Illustrative of Church History to the Time of Constantine, ed. Henry Melvill Gwatkin, (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1958), p. 133.

How this outlook is related backward to Paul and forward to the development of hermeneutical principles is sketched by Grant:

> Origen interprets this passage in the light of Paul's three-fold analysis of human personality (I Thess. 5:23) into "spirit, soul, and body," and concludes that there is a "bodily" or literal sense, a "soul" or moral sense, and a "spiritual" or allegorical-mystical sense in scripture. In actual practice, however, Origen rarely makes use of the moral sense as distinct from the other two senses, and he ordinarily distinguishes merely between the "letter" and the "spirit" (2 Cor. 3:6).[1]

In view of later developments, Origen's strong emphasis on the future hope should not be obscured by a generalizing of "spiritual" interpretation, for here is an adumbration of the anagogical sense of the later interpreters.

Daniélou traces the essentials of the foregoing trichotomy view to Philo and proceeds to sketch the resulting dual interpretation of Scripture.[2] For the ordinary Christians, simple, and even dull of thought, the literal meaning is all that can be apprehended, but for the wise, the knowledgable, the perfect, the spiritual meaning is intended. Thus:

> Now it ought to be known that the holy apostles, in preaching the faith of Christ, delivered themselves with the utmost clearness on certain points which they believed to be necessary to every one, even to those who seemed somewhat dull in the investigation of divine knowledge; leaving, however, the grounds of their statements to be examined into by those who should deserve the excellent gifts of the Spirit, and

---

[1]Grant, Bible in the Church, 68-69.

[2]Daniélou, Origen, 178-91; cf. Nygren, Agape and Eros, 380.

> who, especially by means of the Holy Spirit Himself, should obtain the gift of language, of wisdom, and of knowledge: while on other subjects they merely stated the fact that things were so, keeping silence as to the manner or origin of their existence; clearly in order that the more zealous of their successors, who should be lovers of wisdom, might have a subject of exercise on which to display the fruit of their talents,--those persons, I mean, who should prepare themselves to be fit and worthy receivers of wisdom.[1]

Our third subdivision is in a sense a summary of the preceding and an extension into method. The emphasis on the spirit and the spiritual meaning is derived from the idea that what is evident is only the shadow of reality, and the way to expose the reality is by means of allegorical interpretation.

There are some unpleasant aspects in the elaboration of the concept of those who are "perfect" and competent to probe the mysteries. It appears that God will be known by those who do what they can to find Him,[2] a concept altogether too close to doing "quod in se est." Origen does not absolve himself from this brand of semi-Pelagianism when he writes: "the principles of our faith, harmonizing with the general ideas implanted in our minds at birth..."[3] It is true that Origen stoutly affirms the priority of the revelation of God to man[4]

---

[1]Origen, Works, IV, 239. cf. 355.

[2]Daniélou, Origen, 108.

[3]Origen, Works, IV, 480.

[4]Norris, God and World, 133.

and that the work is dependent on a grace or charisma under prayer for guidance, but these factors do not obviate the allegations of too much involvement with Hellenistic thought patterns, a denigration of the physical body and temporal life, and the construction of an intellectual-spiritual hierarchy within the Church.[1] The results of the method, so far as Christology is concerned, are fundamental to the ensuing debates as Prenter states[2] but heretically subordinationist in the judgment of Barth.[3] Moreover, in another highly sensitive doctrinal point, eschatology, the result is the abandonment of a primitive eschatology in which, notably, God works, to a natural outworking, a continuum of development, an apokatastasis.[4]

Some further appraisal should here be made of this man, justly termed "the father of interpreters."[5] The fact that he was condemned as a heretic may even be construed as a not unusual incident in the troubled days when the Church attempted to clarify its position[6] and

---

[1]v. Grant, Bible in the Church, 69; Smalley, Study of the Bible, 12.

[2]Regin Prenter, Schöpfung und Erlösung: Dogmatik, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), p. 321.

[3]Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, trans. G. T. Thomson et al., 4 Vols. in 12 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), I 1, p. 405.

[4]Patterson, God and History, 54; Nygren, Agape and Eros, 386.

[5]Origen, Works, 235.

[6]Origen, Works, 223.

many bishops who made the venture of theological statement were accused thus by their brethren. For a man of the broad curiosities of Origen it was inevitable that he should raise new issues which could not be explicated neatly, and that a man of his brilliant gifts should be a bit "too clever."[1] On the other hand, that thorough-going Christian piety of Origen's drove him[2] to powerful polemic and apologetic, to a monumental educational task, and thus to the preservation of Christian values in most troublous times, and the avoidance of greater hazards.[3] Our review of Augustine will reveal that that great saint could not ignore Origen and his methods either.

The special purpose of this brief historical survey is a providing of context for the analysis of the hermeneutics of Luther and Melanchthon. Their judgments on Origen, then, have particular relevance. Ebeling cites one element of Luther's critique of the allegorizing of Origen as allegorizing contrary to the Scripture, that would be, against the plain sense of other Scripture.[4] Further, Ebeling comments on the difference in the scopus, that in Origen and those who follow him it is philosophy rather than Christ, the Church, faith

---

[1]Norris, God and World, 156.

[2]Grant, Bible in the Church, 71-72.

[3]Milburn, Early Christian Interpretations, 52.

[4]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 300.

and the office of the ministry that is central.[1] We have seen that Origen considered his thinking Pauline, but Luther contradicts this assumption by pointing out that Paul used allegory only to point to Christ.[2] A partial collection of Luther's description of Origen's exegesis includes the epithets "his ideas are silly,"[3] "amazing twaddle,"[4] and "senseless allegories."[5] Luther considered Origen so dangerous because others followed him so closely,[6] and Jerome, for example, accused of "Origenizing"[7] does not have an individuality, but is one of the condemned group of allegorizers. Apropos of one of our recurring themes, Luther says that Origen failed to perceive that Moses was writing a history.[8]

Melanchthon's reaction to Origen is less immediately accessible. His recognition of the great importance of Origen is indicated

---

[1]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 354. The citations are W.A. XLII: 368, 16-19 and W.A. XLII: 377, 20-22.

[2]Martin Luther, Works, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, 36 Vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955 --), XXVI, p. 433. /Am. Ed./

[3]Luther, Am. Ed., I, 91.

[4]Luther, Am. Ed., I, 98.

[5]Luther, Am. Ed., I, 122.

[6]Luther, Am. Ed. XXVI, 180-81.

[7]Martin Luther, Luther's Correspondence and other Contemporary Letters, trans. and ed. Preserved Smith, 2 Vols. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1913-18), I, p. 69. /Correspondence/

[8]Luther, Am. Ed. I, 90.

in his labelling of the period following the apostles as the age of Origen.[1] Melanchthon approved of Origen's conclusions on baptism[2] and disapproved of his understanding of the letter of Scripture.[3]

## The Antiochenes

Over against the Alexandrian school of interpretation and of theology as dominated by Origen, stands the Antiochene. Any attempt to describe this perspective will be frustrated by the complexity of the patterns and by the mystery of the ineffectiveness of this thinking on dogma and hermeneutics. We shall elaborate on the meaning of this sentence in the conclusion of this brief section.

A succinct statement by Grant will give a perspective on this group of theologian-expositors:

> The school of Antioch insisted on the historical reality of the biblical revelation. They were unwilling to lose it in a world of symbols and shadows. They were more Aristotelian than Platonist. Where the Alexandrines use the word "theory" as equivalent to allegorical interpretation, the Antiochene exegetes use it for a sense of scripture higher or deeper than the literal or historical meaning, but firmly based on the letter. This understanding does not deny the literal meaning of scripture but is grounded on it, as an image is based on the thing

---

[1]Robert Stupperich, Melanchthon, tr. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), p. 95.

[2]Philip Melanchthon, On Christian Doctrine, trans. and ed. Clyde Leonard Manschreck (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 210.

[3]Melanchthon, Christian Doctrine, 201.

> represented and points toward it. Both image and thing are comprehensible at the same time. There is no hidden meaning which only a gnostic can comprehend.[1]

Although the schools of Antioch and Alexandria are not to be viewed as always and in all things opposed to one another,[2] the first, most typical element in the depiction of the Antiochene is the juxtaposition with the Origenistic, Alexandrian ways of thought and interpretation. By contrast, then, the Antiochene hermeneutic insisted on the literal, the historical, in scripture. By this method it was hoped the abuses of allegorism and the "crude literalism...of the Arabians"[3] could be avoided. With a remarkable insight into the methods employed much later in literary criticism, the Antiochenes understood the literal sense to involve an understanding of metaphorical language, and an understanding of the intention of the original writer of the passage.[4] Since they did accept a spiritual sense above the literal, they had to clarify this relationship, and employed the typological in a limited way to materials such as the Old Testament prophecies.

A highly determinative factor in both the method and the problem of Antiochene exegesis is the strongly Christological factor, opposed

---

[1]Grant, Bible in the Church, 76-77.

[2]Adolph Harnack, History of Dogma, trans. Neil Buchanan et al., 7 Vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1958), III, p. 201, n. 2.

[3]Smalley, Study of the Bible, 14.

[4]Smalley, Study of the Bible, 14.

to the cosmological generalizing of the Alexandrians. We shall see this distinctive mark reappearing in the following paragraphs.

Both the temporal and the geographical context play important roles in the history of Antiochene thought. The high period is that following on the external Christianization of the Empire by Constantine. In retrospect it appears that this development allowed, perhaps even encouraged the Church to indulge in the luxury of internal squabbling which cannot be dignified as high level theological debate. Antioch in Syria lay close enough to Constantinople to be aligned hierarchically with that church center. When Alexandria and Rome levelled their attacks at the claims of the see of Constantinople, Antioch was tarred with the same brush. Perhaps, under such circumstances, Antioch could not have expected a fair hearing.

Although Ignatius of Antioch (ob. c. 110) is seldom mentioned as a forerunner of the Antiochene school, he manifests some theological traits typical of those who two centuries later were to give honor to the see. His emphasis on the concrete facts of the history of Jesus Christ, and his Christological center, are emphasized in this passage from the letter to the Trallians:

> Stop your ears therefore when anyone speaks to you that stands apart from Jesus Christ, from David's scion and Mary's Son, who was really born and ate and drank, really persecuted by Pontius Pilate, really crucified and died while heaven and earth and the underworld looked on; who also really rose from the dead, since His Father raised Him up,-- His Father, who will likewise raise us also who

> believe in Him through Jesus Christ, apart from whom we have no real life.[1]

Nygren, too, is satisfied with Ignatius' emphasis on the cross of Christ and the Agape motif.[2] Cyril Richardson confirms the foregoing thesis strikingly in the words, "Ignatius...refused to deny the incarnation. In his passionate devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ Ignatius wanted a real, living man, not an ethereal bodiless spirit, with whom he could have fellowship."[3] Incidentally, the context of this quotation is a longer development of what is essentially a Hebraic mode of understanding the wholeness of man as body and spirit, a concept not unrelated to the historical view we are analyzing in the Antiochenes.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (ob. 428) is the central figure of the Antiochene school. Since the general descriptions of characteristics apply quite uniformly to him, we shall not duplicate the material. We must underscore that he showed an awareness of the need for a distinctively literary criticism.[4] Theodore also demonstrated those elements of the Antiochene method which tended to bring it into

---

[1]Ignatius of Antioch, "To the Trallians," The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch, trans. James A. Kleist (No. 1 of the series, Ancient Christian Writers; Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1961), pp. 77-78.

[2]Nygren, Agape and Eros, 261.

[3]Cyril Charles Richardson, The Christianity of Ignatius of Antioch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), p. 49.

[4]Smalley, Study of the Bible, 15.

disfavor, and this material we shall treat below. The relative obscurity into which he fell is to be attributed partly to the censure he invited, partly to the accidents of time and place, but over against these denigrating forces is the accident that saw some of his work of exposition of Paul's epistles ascribed to Ambrose, under whose reputation the works survived, were respected and widely cited.[1]

Two other personalities of the Antiochene group should be mentioned briefly. The unknown man who wrote between 366 and 384, designated Ambrosiaster, also employed the historical method.[2] The great Chrysostom is also to be reckoned among the Antiochenes in his Biblical understanding, although as a preacher he was not so governed by systematic considerations or exegetical niceties. The fact remains, nevertheless, that his works were widely read and appreciated in both East and West, and that they contained elements of literal-historical interpretation.[3]

M. L. W. Laistner points to three reasons for the discrediting of the work of Theodore and other Antiochenes. The first is the allegation of Nestorianism, or a heterodox Christology, which we must deal with at greater length; the second is Theodore's rejection of the

---

[1]Smalley, Study of the Bible, 17.

[2]Smalley, Study of the Bible, p. 22. M. L. W. Laistner, "Antiochene Exegesis in Western Europe during the Middle Ages," Harvard Theological Review XL, (January, 1947), pp. 19-31.

[3]Smalley, Study of the Bible, p. 18.

teaching on predestination, which does not seem to have been a vital criticism; the third, the rejection of certain books in the canon, a problem to which again we must give further attention.[1]

Whether the subsequent condemnation of Theodore's Christology was justified or not, the fact remains that he invited trouble by the classic enterprise of trying to explicate the inexplicable relationship of the human and divine in Christ. Here the Aristotelian rationalism manifests itself, working toward a logical statement, and ignoring the soteriological character of the Christology which might have protected against the heterodox.[2] Prenter's judgment against Theodore's Christology is "Denn diese Auffassung trennt den irdischen Menschen Jesus Christus von der göttlichen Majestät."[3] The dubious nature of Antiochene Christology is further complicated by a charge of Pelagianism.[4] Both the nature of Christ and the nature and potential of man are treated in a heterodox, Pelagianizing manner when Theodore views grace as a reward.[5]

Perhaps it was an over-zealous concern for the witness to

---

[1]Laistner, Harvard Theological Review, XL, 1, 20.

[2]Harnack, History of Dogma, IV, 166.

[3]Prenter, Schöpfung und Erlösung, 328.

[4]Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 156.

[5]Harnack, History of Dogma, IV, 164, n. 2.

Christ that eventuated in a questioning of the canonicity of certain books of both the Old and New Testaments by the Antiochenes. The rationalism which is an undercurrent in their thought would, of course, tend in the same direction. Whatever the causes, the results were frowned upon, and this high-handed treatment of the canon became one more charge on the long list of accusations.[1]

Less central to the controversy, but significant in the mass of hostile judgments are these further critiques. Miss Smalley puts it most mildly in saying that the West simply preferred allegory.[2] The eclecticism, vagueness and confusion of the Antiochene method undoubtedly was discouraging and some of the anthropomorphisms employed were considered improper to the majesty of God.[3]

The further problems of analysis in their broader scope are well stated by Ebeling:

> ...Es wäre eine reizvolle Aufgabe, den Einflüssen alexandrinischer und antiochenischer Exegese nachgehend die ganzen trinitarischen und christologischen Streitigkeiten als einen Kampf um das hermeneutische Problem zu entfalten. Man dürfte auch dem eigentlichen Anliegen dieser Kämpfe gerechter werden, wenn man sie nicht so sehr nach ihren äusseren Symptomen als Geschichte dogmatischer Formeln, sondern vielmehr nach ihrem eigentlichen Motiv als Stück Geschichte exegetischer Bemühung um die heilige Schrift sieht, d.h. unter dem

---

[1]Harnack, History of Dogma, III, 193, 196 n. 3.

[2]Smalley, Study of the Bible, 19.

[3]Harnack, History of Dogma, IV, 345; III, 200.

> Gesichtspunkt der Vergegenwärtigung der Offenbarung in der Vergangenheit. Die christologischen Formeln sind doch nichts anderes als Versuche--ob mit tauglichen Mitteln, ist eine andere Frage--einerseits die Historizität Jesu Christi zu sichern gegen die Verallgemeinerung der Offenbarung zu einem spekulativen Prinzip, und andererseits die Selbstvergegenwärtigung der geschichtlichen Offenbarung zu betonen gegenüber einer bloss historischen Rückerinnerung und gesetzlich verstandenen Nachbildung dieser Offenbarung. In den altkirchlichen Auseinandersetzungen gehen die diesbezüglichen Linien in komplizierten verworrenheit durcheinander.[1]

Although the Alexandrian emphases persisted with greater strength even after both Origenistic and Antiochene exegesis had been condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 553, and the Antiochene emphasis paled away,[2] one great tribute must be paid this group. Harnack, in italics, says: "They held up before the Church the picture of the historical Christ at a time when the Church in its doctrinal formulae was going further away from Him."[3]

And yet, like some stream disappearing into the desert, the historical, literal interpretation as a self-sufficient program virtually

---

[1]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 118.

[2]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 118.

[3]Harnack, History of Dogma, IV, 170. Supplementary valuable information on the chief early exponents of Alexandrian and Antiochene exegesis with complete bibliographies are to be found Passim in Johannes Quasten, Patrology, Vol. III The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1963).

disappeared in the Church. Even the restoration under the Victorines was temporary.[1]

## Augustine

The amazing disappearance of the Antiochene emphasis is more than matched by the survival and wide dissemination of the work of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. His extensive influence on hermeneutics, which we shall review more precisely at the end of this section, is all the more remarkable in view of a judgment like that of Farrar, that he was "greater as an Apologist and as a Theologian than as an interpreter of Scripture."[2] The power of interpretation to influence the subsequent understanding of the Scripture is illustrated by Nygren's judgment on Augustine's contribution in the Eros-Agape development: "After Augustine the Christian idea of love is no longer the same as before...Augustine's idea of love...even puts the New Testament view of love in the shade."[3] Professor Gordon Rupp's judgment must also be underscored: "It is arguable that the most important single sixteenth-century voice came from the past--that of St. Augustine."[4]

---

[1]Smalley, Study of the Bible, 357.

[2]Farrar, History, 234.

[3]Nygren, Agape and Eros, 450.

[4]E. G. Rupp, "The Bible in the Age of the Reformation," The Church's Use of the Bible: Past and Present, ed. D. E. Nineham, (London: S.P.C.K., 1963), p. 73.

Were it not for the necessity laid upon us, and attested by the nexus of Augustinian hermeneutics and Luther-Melanchthon problems, we would have preferred to avoid the survey of this area in its richness and complexity. It is moderately cheering to discover that Portalié agrees that "an overall judgment of Augustine's exegesis is difficult to formulate, so diverse are the aspects of his work."[1] Although the attitude of Baroque Jesuitism cited by Barth seems to manifest a partisan perversity, its conclusions are credible to the frustrated researcher:

> His real views are so recondite and confused that we can only assume either that he does not want to be understood, or that he had not sufficient command of language for the purpose; and in addition he is of a passionate nature and inclined to extremes, ebbing and flowing like the ocean.[2]

In view of the endlessly seminal quality of the works, an obviously more perceptive and appropriate analysis is made by Gilson:

> Perhaps the lack of order we find in Augustine is due merely to the fact that it has an order different from that we expect. Instead of the synthetic, linear order displayed by doctrines which follow the process of the intellect, we find a method of exposition necessarily different because it is suited to a doctrine whose center is grace and charity. If we are dealing not so much with knowledge but with love, then the philosopher's task is not so much to

---

[1]Eugene Portalié, A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine, trans. Ralph J. Bastian (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1960), p. 123.

[2]Barth, C. D., I, 2, p. 558.

> cause knowledge as to cause love. Now in order to arouse love we do not prove, we show.[1]

To attempt to understand these difficult and complex works without scanning the historical background would be both foolhardy and impossible. The preceding paragraphs of this chapter may be seen in the light of Oberman's judgment that in Augustine "the concerns of Origen and Chrysostom had been reconciled; the schools of Alexandria and Antioch had found a common heir."[2] The role of the recurrently influential Origen in this history is variously assessed. Ernst Hoffman terms Origen merely a forerunner of Augustine[3] in view of the distinctive contributions which Augustine made. Grant notes that Origen was bitterly attacked by the later interpreter.[4] It is evident that Augustine was neither an eclectic nor a slavish imitater.

The influence of individual predecessors was supplemented by more general forces which were active in the culture of Augustine's time. Thus Harnack judges that "in the course of the fifth century, a

---

[1]Etienne Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine, trans. L. E. M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), p. 236.

[2]Heiko Augustinus Oberman, Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 283.

[3]Ernst Hoffmann, "Platonism in Augustine's Philosophy of History," Philosophy and History: Essays presented to Ernst Cassirer, ed. Raymond Klibansky and H. J. Paton, (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 179.

[4]Grant, Bible in the Church, 70.

sort of common sense established itself, which could be taken as forming...a middle line between the exegetic methods of Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria."[1] Barth analyzes the predilection of the Western church as to substantive concerns thus:

> In relative distinction from the aim of the trinitarian and christological dogmas of the early Church, it /Neo-Protestantism/ wished to see and to understand not only God in His relation to man but also man in his relation to God. We may say that even in the early days this was always the special desire of the Western Church and it found its active representative especially in Augustine.[2]

By contrast to the wide variety of analyses drawn from data such as that in the lines immediately preceding, the events of Augustine's personal life and time were given unambiguous and definite interpretation by Augustine himself. The primary literary evidences are the Confessions, on the personal side, and the City of God and the polemical/apologetic tracts in the broader relations. Gilson concludes that Augustine himself gave such significance to his own history that his doctrine was a continuous commentary on it.[3] Put in other words by Gilson, "His doctrine is the metaphysics of his own conversion and remains preeminently the metaphysics of conversion."[4] The

---

[1]Harnack, History of Dogma, III, 200.

[2]Barth, C. D., I/2, 208.

[3]Gilson, Christian Philosophy, 227.

[4]Gilson, Christian Philosophy, 240. v. also J. V. Langmead Casserley, The Christian in Philosophy, (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1949), p. 44.

possibility inherent in such a position of assuming an unbridled subjectivity was effectively countermanded by two factors: the constant polemic directed against Augustine, and his own exceptional dialectical competence acting in self-appraisal and self-criticism.

Augustine's favorable attitude to allegorism was a significant illustration of the interrelationship of personal history and doctrine. The Manichean criticisms of the Christian understandings of the Scripture and particularly of the Old Testament were based on a literalism which to Augustine seemed incontrovertible. But then Ambrose's brilliant allegorizing impressed him as an effective way through the dilemma of interpretation, and the totality of the preaching was played in to the final conversion of Augustine. That sedes doctrinae, II Cor. 3:6, with its juxtaposition of letter and spirit became vitally important to him.[1]

Thus he can use the most offensively typical style and material of allegory, and defend it on the basis of its presumed greater power to communicate:

> And yet, I don't know why, I feel greater pleasure in contemplating holy men, when I view them as the teeth of the Church, tearing men away from their errors, and bringing them into the Church's body, with all their harshness softened down, just as if they had been torn off and masticated by the teeth. It is with the greatest pleasure, too, that I recognize them under the figure of sheep that have been shorn,

---

[1]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 119; Grant, Bible in the Church, 91f.

> laying down the burthens of the world like fleeches, and coming up from the washing, i.e., from baptism, and all bearing twins, i.e., the twin commandments of love, and none among them barren in that holy fruit.[1]

The persistent usage of name and number symbolisms is exhibited a few pages later in the same work.[2]

In spite of such occasional displays of standard allegorization, Augustine can hardly be considered typical of the group which Farrar castigates:

> In the days of Augustine the method had degenerated into an artistic method of displaying ingenuity and supporting ecclesiasticism. It had become the resource of a faithlessness which declined to admit of an ignorance which failed to appreciate, and of an indolence which refused to solve the real difficulties in which the sacred book abounds.[3]

We are more impressed with the weight of Grant's judgment that for Augustine "allegorical method was only a stepping-stone toward a final interpretation of scripture," and that he moved more and more toward a literal understanding.[4]

There are even broader applications of the personal principle to the hermeneutics of Augustine. It is not only that Augustine

---

[1]Augustine, Christian Doctrine ii.6. (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, ed., Philip Schaff, Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1887), II, 6, p. 537.

[2]Augustine Christian Doctrine ii.16.

[3]Farrar, History, 239.

[4]Grant, Bible in the Church, 93.

discovered the value of the individual as Richardson states[1] but it is a normative role of individual thought which may be designated a "religious subjectivism" or "religious idealism," thus qualified:

> Noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi: in interiore homine habitat veritas. Actual being, knowing, willing, the actual esse, nosse, velle constitute the unshakable point of departure for all theory; for the mind knows nothing better than what is present in it, and nothing is more present in it than itself. These sentences establish the primacy of the religious experience above all the dogmatic conclusions of a metaphysical doctrine of the soul and of God.[2]

Such statements lead further to the judgment that "each man sees the truth common to all only to the extent that it becomes the truth of his own mind."[3]

It would be easy and fatal to move from such premises to the conclusion that truth is truth for the individual. Although references may be found which seem to tolerate a multiplicity of interpretations with no possibility of reconciliation or value judgment, there are at least three countermanding forces operative in Augustine to avert such confusions. The one is the role of tradition and the church, with which we shall deal later. Another is the element of certainty inherent in

---

[1]Alan Richardson, History Sacred and Profance (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 62.

[2]Ernst Cassirer, The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy, trans. Mario Domandi (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), pp. 127-128. V. also Casserley, Christian in Philosophy, 44.

[3]Gilson, Christian Philosophy, 245.

the knowing:

> The Augustinian soul discovers an invincible certitude and a guarantee of the possibility of certitude in general in the very act whereby it apprehends itself. Hence, one of the prime characteristics of metaphysical Augustinianism is that the certainty with which the soul apprehends itself is the first of all certitudes and the criterion of truth.[1]

The third force is the position of the self over against God. "The essence of Augustine's theism, this immediate self-consciousness is not a consciousness of the self alone....My self-consciousness... carries with it an immediate apprehension of the Creator."[2]

In that position before God, Augustine is fully aware of the Biblical, realistic fact of man's sinfulness and its effect on man's ability to know God. "The heavenly Father intervenes to meet the needs of sin-blinded souls by offering to their faith, on the authority of God, the truth which they are as sinners incapable of ascertaining for themselves. This is the essence of Augustine's doctrine of revelation."[3] The application of this principle to a near-Biblicist point of view needs no further elaboration here. Related to the problem of the material of revelation is the issue of interpretation. The clouded intelligence of sinful man needs God's grace in the work of interpreting:

---

[1]Gilson, Christian Philosophy, 244.

[2]Casserley, Christian in Philosophy, 44.

[3]Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, Studies in Tertullian and Augustine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 162.

> And presumptuous it would undoubtedly be, if I were counting on my own strength; but since my hope of accomplishing the work rests on Him who has already supplied me with many thoughts on this subject, I do not fear but that He will go on to supply what is yet wanting when once I have begun to use what He has already given....Now, just as that bread increase in the very act of breaking it, so those thoughts which the Lord has already vouchsafed to me with a view to undertaking this work will, as soon as I begin to impart them to others, be multiplied by His grace.[1]

Since Augustine himself distinguished the inhabitants of the two cities by their difference in love[2] we may see the condition of sinful man as lacking in love to God and the new man as the recipient of love--caritas--from God. That spiritual understanding results from this bestowal of love Augustine establishes thus:

> If, therefore, it was mainly for this purpose that Christ came, to wit, that man might learn how much God loves him; and that he might learn this, to the intent that he might be kindled to the love of Him by whom he was first loved, and might also love his neighbor at the command and showing of Him who became our neighbor....According to this revealing, on the other hand, spiritual men,--among whom we reckon at once those then who knocked in piety and found even hidden things opened to them,... understanding in a spiritual fashion, have been made free through the love wherewith they have been gifted.[3]

As to the purpose for which Scripture is given we note "the end of the

---

[1]Augustine Christian Doctrine i.1.

[2]John M. Headley, Luther's View of Church History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 68.

[3]Augustine On the Catechising of the Uninstructed iv.8.

Law, and of all Holy Scripture, is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed."[1] This objective is in sharp contrast with the search for wisdom which characterized so many of Augustine's predecessors. In place of that speculative, cosmological knowledge Augustine sees the Scripture concerned about "die existentielle Liebesgemeinschaft mit Gott" as Ebeling states it.[2] Again, the time of the achievement of this communion must be left for consideration below.

That Augustine intended caritas to be the scopus of Biblical understanding is indicated in the frequently quoted passage:

> Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this two-fold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought. If, on the other hand, a man draws a meaning from them that may be used for the building up of love, even though he does not happen upon the precise meaning which the author whom he reads intended to express in that place, his error is not pernicious, and he is wholly clear from the charge of deception.[3]

Granted the general concept, caritas, then, as central, the fact still remains that the elements united under the concept are, as Nygren says, combined less logically than psychologically.[4] Burnaby, for example, draws out the idea of caritas as the vision of God, and

---

[1]Augustine Christian Doctrine i.35.

[2]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 121.

[3]Augustine Christian Doctrine i.36.

[4]Nygren, Agape and Eros, 452.

relates it to the menacing specter of Neo-Platonism in Augustine.[1] Further evidences of the presence of this persistent intruder will be submitted below.

Another vital area of questioning is raised by Nygren's blunt statement:

> It is beyond question that when Augustine speaks of Caritas, he always thinks primarily of love to God. It is vital to keep this in mind if we are to avoid being misled by the rich variety of his view of love.[2]

Whether this challenge is valid or not may be determined by some analysis of Augustine's understanding of the centrality of Christ and his view of history and what happens in it.

We may well conclude with Burnaby that in Augustine "the faith which cleanses us...is the faith in the fact and purpose of the Incarnation."[3] Note this element and the phrase "in time" in the following:

> Behold, then, why the Son of God was sent; nay rather, behold what it is for the Son of God to be sent. Whatever things they were which were wrought in time, with a view to produce faith, whereby we might be cleansed so as to contemplate truth, in things that have a beginning, which have been put forth from eternity, and are referred back to eternity: these were either testimonies of this

---

[1]John Burnaby, Amor Dei (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1947), p. 35.

[2]Nygren, Agape and Eros, 452-53.

[3]Burnaby, Amor Dei, 76.

> mission, or they were the mission itself of the Son of God.[1]

But we observe not many lines following this passage the curious Platonic interpretation of the Incarnation stated thus:

> Or how does He say this, too, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them...I will love him, and will manifest myself to him," at a time when He was manifest before the eyes of men; unless because He was offering that flesh, which the Word was made in the fullness of time, to be accepted by our faith; but was keeping back the Word itself, by whom all things were made, to be contemplated in eternity by the mind when cleansed by faith?[2]

Again, there is an evangelical elegance in such an exposition as this:

> For the mere syllables of Christ's name, and the Christian sacraments, are of no profit, where faith in Christ is itself resisted. For faith in Christ is to believe in Him that justifieth the ungodly; to believe on the Mediator, without whose interposition we cannot be reconciled unto God; to believe in the Saviour, who came to seek and to save that which was lost; to believe in Him who said, "Without me ye can do nothing."[3]

Augustine's notable sermon on Matthew 20:39 seems to be of the same character. With fine homiletical skill, Augustine sketches the elements of incarnation meaning in "Jesus passed by." Here is the birth from the Virgin, the infant suckling, boyhood, youth, man's full stature, miracles, death and resurrection. The jarring note is struck in the analysis of what this "passing by" means for man. "Now what

---

[1]Augustine On the Trinity iv.19.

[2]Augustine On the Trinity iv.19.

[3]Augustine On the Gospel of John, Tractate iiii.10.

is it, Brethren, 'to cry out' unto Christ, but to correspond to the grace of Christ by good works?"[1] This is the type of evidence from which Niebuhr must have concluded that Augustine failed to see redemption as a dramatic act of God.[2]

Without adducing further primary citations, we may well point out some conclusions as to the place of Jesus Christ in the theology of Augustine. Althaus, viewing Augustine as Luther's closest forerunner in the understanding that we meet the Father in the man Jesus, nevertheless judges "for Augustine it is only one point among many others."[3] Thomas F. Torrance has stated that Augustine's mistake was "to detach grace from the person of Christ and to think of it as acting impersonally upon man."[4]

E. Thestrup Pedersen's line of analysis is the distinction between Christ as example and Christ as sacrament. He argues that Luther properly inverted Augustine's order to make the sacramental primary.[5] A consequence of the primacy of the exemplar concept in

---

[1]Augustine Sermon on Matthew 20:30 xxxviii.9, 12.

[2]Reinhold Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pp. 100-101.

[3]Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 183.

[4]Torrance, Doctrine of Grace, 33, n.2.

[5]E. Thestrup Pedersen, Luther som Skriftfortolker: En studie i Luthers skriftsyn hermentik og eksegese (København: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1959), pp. 151-52.

Augustine is that grace is viewed as a power looking forward to the final judgment.[1] It is this concept, when transcribed into hermeneutical perspectives, which we see so strongly emphasized in Augustine's views of progressiveness, of growth toward understanding.

This process is precisely stated in the work On Christian Doctrine, where so much of Augustine's hermeneutical position may be read:

> Wherefore, since it is our duty fully to enjoy the truth which lives unchangeably, and since the triune God takes counsel in this truth for the things which he has made, the soul must be purified that it may have power to perceive that light, and to rest in it when it is perceived. And let us look upon this purification as a kind of journey or voyage to our native land. For it is not by change of place that we can come nearer to Him who is in every place, but by the cultivation of pure desires and virtuous habits.[2]

In response to a specific question, Augustine wrote this answer which forms a commentary on the "journey" toward "purification" enunciated above:

> And perhaps there may be, nay, beyond all question there are, written in the sacred books, counsels by the knowledge of which the man of God may so discharge his duties to the Church in the things of God, or at least so keep a conscience void of offence in the midst of ungodly men, whether living or dying, as to secure that life for which alone humble and meek Christian hearts sigh is not lost. But how can this be done, except, as the Lord Himself tells us,

---

[1]Pedersen, Skrftfortolker, 263.

[2]Augustine Christian Doctrine i.10.

> by asking, seeking, knocking, that is, by praying, reading and weeping?[1]

Seen from another typically Augustinian point of view, what we are here describing may be related to humility. As Gilson puts it:

> Reduced to its abstract form, Augustine's experience may be said to amount to a discovery of humility. Errors of understanding are bound up with the corruption of the heart through pride, and man only finds the truth which brings happiness by subjecting his intellect to faith and his will to grace, in humility.[2]

The interplay of these factors is supported by the evidence of Augustine's most frequently quoted Scripture verses: Rom. 7:22-25 "...Who will deliver me...unhappy man that I am!...the grace of god." (at least 225 times.) Rom. 5:5 "The charity of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit." (201 times.) I Cor. 4:7 "What have you got that you have not received?" (120 times.)[3]

Inevitably enmeshed in every analysis of Augustine is some facet of the problem of history. We have touched on this complex issue previously in connection with Christology and soteriology. We must now attempt a fuller exposition in order to establish the limits of possibility for the interpreter and to set a critical base for further appraisal of his hermeneutic.

---

[1]Augustine Letter xxi.4.

[2]Gilson, Christian Philosophy, 227.

[3]Henri Marrou, St. Augustine and his Influence through the Ages, trans. Patrick Hepburne-Scott (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 84.

To be fair to his predecessors, and to understand the magnitude of the break-through in the understanding of history with Augustine, we must be very careful to recall the situation to which he was heir. The Hellenistic, cyclical, chronicle type of history which was prevalent, intrinsically negated the Hebraic-Christian view of time, of reality and of the concrete events of the history of salvation. What we have seen in Philo and Origen has been an accomodation to this point of view. As a consequence, as J. N. D. Kelly says of the Latin Fathers: "What was perhaps the greatest gap in their understanding of the Bible /~~was~~/ their failure to appreciate the significance of history."[1] It follows naturally from this that "Augustine found the historical character of Christianity baffling in the context of this Greek heritage" as Carl Michalson states.[2] In two pregnant sentences, Alan Richardson indicates the nexus of the historical problem, to which Augustine addressed himself as we have seen above, and the radical breakthrough which he effected to a new era:

> The basic difference between the Greek and the Hebrew view is that the Hebrews regarded history as the locus of man's knowledge of himself and of God in a way which the Greeks did not. The triumph of the Hebraic-Christian view over the classical, achieved by the time of Augustine,

---

[1]J. N. D. Kelly, "The Bible and the Latin Fathers," The Church's Use of the Bible, ed. Nineham, 54.

[2]Carl Michalson, The Hinge of History: An Existential Approach to the Christian Faith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 171.

> made possible the ultimate emergence, after many centuries, of modern scientific historiography.[1]

The primary factor of contingency, seriously employed,dominates the fresh outlook on history. Although John Baillie was addressing himself to the problem of the natural sciences when he spoke the words, the historical references are so analogous to our problem that a lengthy quotation is in order here:

> Modern science could not have come into being until the ancient pagan conception of the natural world had given place to the Christian. The reason why ancient science was so little observational, and hardly at all experimental, was that in holding so fast to the intelligibility of the world it failed to do justice to its contingency. ...The world-process...would follow...a cyclical course, and some of them /the Greek scientists/ even thought they knew the length of time that each cycle would take to accomplish itself. ...What Christianity did was, as it were, to roll the circle of time out flat. The rectilinear conception of time, which we all now take for granted, was introduced into Western thought by Christianity. Moreover, a Christian thinker like St. Augustine is well aware of the radical change which this imports. He is fully conscious that the new faith stands for a disruption of the pattern which pagan science had imposed upon the course of nature. And he is particularly conscious of the element of contingency in nature which the Christian doctrine of creation forces us to recognize.[2]

The contingency which for Augustine is the "unique" event

---

[1]A. Richardson, History, 58-59.

[2]John Baillie, Natural Science and the Spiritual Life (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), pp. 25-26.

which "shatters" history as Headley puts it[1] is the Incarnation. Principal Burleigh couches the same idea in the terms "the clue and the climax of history."[2] In Augustine's own words:

> Far be it from any true believer to suppose that by these words of Solomon those cycles are meant, in which, according to these philosophers, the same periods and events of time are repeated...For once Christ died for our sins; and, rising from the dead, He dieth no more. "Death hath no more dominion over Him."...And that, too, which follows, is, I think, appropriate enough: "The wicked walk in a circle;" not because their life is to recur by means of these circles, which these philosophers imagine, but because the path in which their false doctrine now runs is circuitous.[3]

The cyclical view was meaningless because what had happened would happen again, what was, both had been and would be. The straightened-out lineal history gave meaning to past, present and future. The model is given in The City of God with its sweeping survey of the past and its tremendous concern with the eternal future. No longer can the historian work with Croce's "fragment of chain." History is to be studied in its totality; the prospect is opened for a truly universal history.[4] The way is open for establishing periods in

---

[1]Headley, Luther's View, 107.

[2]John Henderson Seaforth Burleigh, The City of God: A Study of St. Augustine's Philosophy (London: Nisbet, 1949), p. 194.

[3]Augustine The City of God xii.13. Cf. Burleigh, City of God, 205.

[4]Burleigh, City of God, 194.

history: there are basically two, the one before Christ and the other after Christ, but more refined definitions may also be drawn.[1] In this historical continuum the historical cosmology, the drama of sin and grace is played out. Nature is real both in the creation and in man.[2] Unfortunately, this kind of stress may also work adversely to essential concepts. Thus, Israel loses significance in herself, since her history is only preface to the celestial City which it darkly foreshadows.[3] The monocular view of the dividing point in the Christ-event has done something else to Augustine's perspective. Professor Burleigh has noted it in a passage which remarkably adumbrates a major concern of contemporary historiography:

> Christ...has inaugurated the present Age in the new Christian sense...Yet one may feel that St. Augustine has not made as much as he might have done of this conception, at any rate in the specifically historical books. Christocentric they undoubtedly are, but they are also so exclusively Biblical that the epochal significance of the Coming of Christ for secular no less than for sacred history is little observed.[4]

Still, the linear view keeps clear that history is moving toward something. Burleigh's analysis is: "History as such has an end rather

---

[1]Burleigh, City of God, 208.

[2]Gilson, Christian Philosophy, 239.

[3]Burleigh, City of God, 197.

[4]Burleigh, City of God, 208.

than a goal. It is a process rather than a progress."[1] Ernst Hoffman's summary reads:

> God...aims in history at a definitive meaning, at a decision, at a victory; and this He will in His omnipotence accomplish; the decision will fall out as He wills. It will so fall out that earthly history, be it as example, be it as warning, be it as it may, shall prove itself to be the prelude to eternity.[2]

Now a further distinctive viewpoint in Augustine must be set forth--the understanding of the very nature of time itself. Karl Barth levels his criticism at Augustine by correlating him closely with Heidegger:

> Augustine, like Heidegger, regards time definitively and unequivocally as a self-determination of man's existence as a creature. Man possesses time by taking it for himself, in fact, by creating it. ...Reality lies with this existence, with the act of man's animus, with "temporality" as the possibility of man's existence, but not with time as such.[3]

Eric Rust does not give so absolute an existentialist interpretation to Augustine's position, but recognizes that for Augustine "time found its true reality in the soul" and grounded that "reality in its relation to God."[4] In the same section of his analysis Rust states

---

[1]Burleigh, City of God, 214.

[2]Hoffmann, "Augustine's Philosophy of History," 185.

[3]Barth, C. D., I/2, 46.

[4]Eric C. Rust, Towards a Theological Understanding of History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 214.

"past, present, and future,...all are compresent in the soul."[1] This comports with the statement of Hoffmann just following the excerpt cited above: "God has resolved so to order it that this decision comes about not through outward human events but in human souls."[2] We see the significance of this analysis when we remember that Augustine's view of the self establishes the person as a microcosm[3] within the macrocosm of the world. As the individual person, then, relates to time, so also does the world.

This emphasis on the reality of time only in the soul would seem to encourage, even to dictate, such an existentialist view as Barth deprecated throughout Augustine. Patterson's resolution of the problem is somewhat different, however. He does say, first:

> Thus it may be observed as one peculiar result of Augustine's Latin adaptations of Greek Christian ideas that he thinks of the new life of communion with Christ as so clearly combining present fulfillment and future promise that its fundamentally eschatological character is often obscured.[4]

Clearly, "eschatological" in the last line means futurist eschatology, Modifying and elucidation follows shortly thereafter:

---

[1]Rust, Theological Understanding, 213.

[2]Hoffmann, "Augustine's Philosophy of History," 185.

[3]v. Owen Barfield, Saving the Appearances: A Study in History, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1965), p. 78.

[4]Patterson, God and History, 114.

> It should be clear from this work that every reference to the coming of Christ is a reference to the immediate presence of a life which is to be lived in its fullness only in the future. Augustine's peculiar foreshortening of the distance between present and future is, in fact, a result of the transformation of the contemporary Greek Christian interest in the achievement of perfection by the soul into a characteristically Latin Christian call to heed the challenge posed by present events.[1]

In addition, the importance of the given revelation, which Reinhold Niebuhr sees preventing Augustine from falling into mysticism,[2] here avert a subjectivist existentialism.

Augustine draws upon the revelation, and perhaps makes more use of the polarity homiletically than systematically of a present and a future, more exactly "evil present and better future." Thus, then, the peroration of one of the tractates:

> For here we are born and die: let us not love this world; let us migrate hence by love; by love let us dwell above, by that love by which we love God. In this sojourn of our life let us meditate on nothing else, but that here we shall not always be, and that by good living we shall prepare place for ourselves there, whence we shall never migrate.[3]

Similarly, in the sermon on Jesus' passing by cited earlier:

> By faith we perceive Christ "passing by" in the temporal economy, so we may attain to the knowledge of Him as "standing still" in His

---

[1]Patterson, God and History, 115.

[2]Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, 158.

[3]Augustine Tractate on John 7:37-39, xxxii.9.

unchangeable Eternity."[1]

The emphasis on the future is so strong that it is designated "other-worldliness" in a pejorative sense by both Wilburn and Burnaby. Thus Wilburn:

> Too other-worldly are Augustine's statements that the supreme good is not to be found in this life, that in history we have no hold on salvation and can only wait for it in hope, and that the church merely wanders like a stranger on earth.[2]

And Burnaby notes: "No Christian Father is more uncompromising in his other-worldliness than is Augustine."[3] Whether this other-worldliness is due to Platonic influence as Burnaby alleges in his next sentence, may be questionable.

Typically, Augustine's key to understanding the Scripture, caritas, should be the catalyst for the antithesis of present--future. This is what Burnaby maintains:

> Love--this is what Augustine means--is the confounder of all antitheses. It breaks the line between the here and the hereafter, between change and the changeless, time and eternity. It is peace in conflict, contemplation in the midst of action, sight piercing through faith. For in love the divine meets the human: heaven comes to earth when Christ is born, and man rejoices in the Truth.[4]

---

[1]Augustine Sermon on Matt. 20:30, xxxviii.14.

[2]Ralph G. Wilburn, The Historical Shape of Faith, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 38.

[3]Burnaby, Amor Dei, 29.

[4]Burnaby, Amor Dei, 82.

These are good words, and homiletically undoubtedly effective. However, the bold acceptance of the paradoxical element in the time concept, of which Luther was to make so significant a point, as Pauck says in his introduction to the Lectures on Romans, this simul...et, "cannot be found in Augustine's writings."[1]

We must do more than simply point to the ambiguities of caritas talk in resolving the question of the connection between present and future, time and eternity, man and God, Scriptural words and the living word. Certainly Augustine was aware of the complexity of the problem as a result of his own thinking and because of the polemics directed against Christian intelligence and Christian interpretation. In On Christian Doctrine, where theory precedes homiletical application, the steps to wisdom are set out as fear, piety, knowledge, resolution, counsel, purification of heart, wisdom.[2] We must note first that these steps are all theological rather than psychological or strictly epistemological. Of their essential meaning we have dealt briefly in early sections of this unit. Knowledge, in the listing here, is interpreted as the caritas scopus. The transition from an apparent emphasis on moral purification to illumination and faith, in other words from experience to understanding, is well made by Gilson:

---

[1]Luther: Lectures on Romans, trans. and ed. Wilhelm Pauck, (The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XV.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. xliv.

[2]Augustine On Christian Doctrine ii.7.

> Let us remember at the outset that the Augustinian doctrine of the relations between faith and reason gives formal expression to a moral experience and for that reason refuses to separate illumination of the mind from purification of the heart. In its essence, Augustinian faith is both an adherence of the mind to supernatural truth and a humble surrender of the whole man to the grace of Christ. ...The adherence of the mind to God's authority implies humility, but humility in turn presupposes a confidence in God, and this in itself is an act of love and charity.[1]

Our concern at this point is faith, as Augustine himself says: "The action of piety is faith, the fruit of faith understanding, that we may come to eternal life, when there will be no reading of Gospel to us."[2] And again, on the progression to final sight:

> That is the right purpose which starts from faith. For a certain faith is in some way the starting-point of knowledge; but a certain knowledge will not be made perfect, except after this life, when we shall see face to face.[3]

This faith for Augustine is something more than arbitrary choice or alignment. It involves commitment and participation.

> What then is "to believe on Him?" By believing to love Him, by believing to esteem highly, by believing to go into Him and to be incorporated in His members.[4]

Now commitment and participation may not be partial, therefore the

---

[1]Gilson, Christian Philosophy, 31.

[2]Augustine Tractate on John 5:24-30 xxii.2.

[3]Augustine On the Trinity ix.1.

[4]Augustine Tractate on John 7:14-18 xxix.6. cf. Burnaby, Amor Dei, 27.

resulting knowing must also involve the whole man, as Warfield explains.[1]

This kind of faith is held by the individual, hence by individuals who now live, or have lived, or will live, by the congregatio fidelium. In some way, which may well differ from theological school to school, or theologian to theologian, the faith of the believing community, the attitude of the church will become involved in the process of knowing.[2] Rather perversely and illogically, however, Augustine exempts the Church, the congregation of believers, from that judgment of pride which might be expected to work a due humility in the individual believer as interpreter. Reinhold Niebuhr's criticism is to the point:

> He could not conceive of it /the church/ as standing itself under divine judgment. In other words the church was the historic locus where the contradiction between the historical and the divine was overcome in fact; rather than that locus where the judgment and the mercy of God upon the historical are mediated, and where, therefore, the contradiction of the historical and the holy is overcome in principle. ...The church does not, in other words, really stand under the judgment of God. Rather it reigns with Christ.[3]

What the extension of this idea means in terms of the authority of the church is indicated in a summary by Warfield:

> The entire sense, then, seems to be that what is taught by the Church on authority, is equally defended by the church by reason, through the appropriate organs of reason. The Church as the pillar and ground of the

---

[1]Warfield, Studies, 150.

[2]Headley, Luther's View, 268.

[3]Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, 138-39.

> truth commends it to faith; the Church, giving a reason for the faith that is in it, defends it to reason. The Doctor, in other words, is as truly a manifestation of the Church's inherent life as the Bishop himself: reasoning is as inadmissibly her function as authoritative definition.[1]

Here the methodological, subjective aspect is emphasized, what Oberman calls the "practical priority of Augustine's commovere."[2]

As concerns the material tradition, what is important is the Rule of Faith. As Grant says, "Augustine is no simple traditionalist, yet he upholds the authority of the rule of faith."[3] Here Augustine is very explicit:

> If, when attention is given to the passage, it shall appear to be uncertain in what way it ought to be punctuated or pronounced, let the reader consult the rule of faith which he has gathered from the plainer passages of Scripture, and from the authority of the Church, and of which I treated at sufficient length when I was speaking in the first book about things.[4]

And again: "Now Scripture asserts nothing but the catholic faith, in regard to things past, future, and present."[5]

The authority of the church is also applicable to questions of

---

[1]Warfield, Studies, 169-70.

[2]Heiko Augustinus Oberman, The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 386.

[3]Grant, Bible in the Church, 93.

[4]Augustine On Christian Doctrine iii.2. v. also iii.5.

[5]Augustine On Christian Doctrine iii.10.

the canon.[1]

Oberman considers that Augustine allows the Church to establish even an extrascriptural tradition:

> In contrast with Irenaeus' condemnation of extra-scriptural tradition, in Augustine we find mention of an authoritative extrascriptural oral tradition. While on the one hand the Church "moves" the faithful to discover the authority of Scripture, Scripture on the other hand refers the faithful back to the authority of the Church with regard to a series of issues with which the Apostles did not deal in writing. Augustine refers here to the baptism of heretics.[2]

The passage to which Oberman refers is the early treatise On Baptism, against the Donatists:

> For if none have baptism who entertain false views about God, it has been proved sufficiently, in my opinion, that this may happen even within the Church. "The apostles," indeed, "gave no injunctions on the point," /quoting Cyprian, Ep. lxxiv.2/ but the custom, which is opposed to Cyprian, may be supposed to have had its origin in apostolic tradition, just as there are many things which are observed by the whole Church, and therefore are fairly held to have been enjoined by the apostles, which yet are not mentioned in their writings.[3]

Such statements leave Augustine vulnerable to the sharp criticism of a Farrar:

---

[1]Augustine Christian Doctrine ii.8.

[2]Oberman, Harvest, 370-71.

[3]Augustine On Baptism, Against the Donatists v.23.

> He laid down the rule that the Bible must be interpreted with reference to Church Orthodoxy, and that no Scriptural expression can be out of accordance with any other. He therefore, in support of this view, demanded that all interpretation should be panharmonic, and he helped to stereotype the current misapplication of the phrase "the analogy of faith."[1]

In a similar view Karl Barth also criticizes the Augustinian view on the Church as it affects the message of the Word:

> The cross of Jesus Christ is lacking in the Augustinian conception, and therefore it lacks the true divine trustworthiness. The real civitas Dei on earth, which is invincible, and can therefore be proclaimed with confidence, is not the rule of the Church, but the rule of Him who in this world had to be nailed to the cross. And for his followers this means the rule of Scripture and the faith in which such a rule finds obedience.[2]

How we are to reconcile the offensive traditionalism and ecclesiasticism to which our citations have given support, with the personalistic, evangelical elements is hard to determine. If we accept the relativizing of statements like Croce's "every thinking of history is always adequate to the moment at which it appears and always inadequate to the moment that follows"[3] we may feel the issue is somewhat resolved. Wilburn applies this form of appraisal to point out the development of this aspect in Augustinian theology and its contrast with the other emphasis on the personal:

---

[1]Farrar, History, 236.

[2]Barth, C. D. I/2, 679.

[3]Benedetto Croce, History: Its Theory and Practice, trans. Douglas Ainslie (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960), p. 201.

> Through the Donatist controversy, however, Augustine was led to attribute to the institutional church, with its infallible dogma and saving Sacraments, qualities that in his more spiritual moments of reflection he was willing to apply only to the spiritual community constituted by grace, on the one hand, and by faith, hope, and love, on the other. The concept of the church that was the heart throb of Augustine's own soul focused in the reality of God's immediately experienced grace and the response of faith, hope and love. At heart, Augustine remained a mystic, not a Sacramentarian. But as Adolf Harnack has aptly said, "Augustine subordinated the notion of the Church and Sacraments to the spiritual doctrine of God, Christ, the gospel, faith and love as far as that was at all possible about 400 A.D."[1]

A less notorious instance of Augustine's concern with the role of the Church in interpretation, certainly less well understood, is his citation of the seven rules of Tichonius.[2] Farrar sees in them an obnoxious "tropology"[3] by which he evidently means allegory. In his encyclopedia article Ebeling emphasizes the character of emphasis on the Geschichtliche:

> Diese Skopus-Angabe schliesst für Augustin die Verbindung mit einem der Metaphysik entlehnten Kriterium nicht aus, lässt aber demgegenüber mehr Raum zur Berücksichtigung des Geschichtlichen, als es bei Origenes der Fall gewesen war. Dem kam auch die Übernahme und Einarbeitung der sieben Regeln des Ticonius....entgegen: Hinweise auf

---

[1]Wilburn, Historical Shape, 40.

[2]Augustine On Christian Doctrine iii.31-37.

[3]Farrar, History, 237.

> heilsgeschichtliche Strukturen des Schriftinhaltes als Schlüssel zu dessen Verständnis.[1]

In Evangelische Evangelienauslegung Ebeling draws out more incisively the implications of the Augustinian incorporation of the Tichonius material. There he makes clear that the dominant motif in all the rules is some aspect of the Church, in accordance with the point of view expressed by Tichonius, "nihil describit scriptura praeter ecclesiam." Ebeling indicates that the seven rules utilize the historical incidents of the Church, by analogy, to illuminate other portions of Scripture. Ebeling points out that a study of the dependence of Augustine on Tichonius for his doctrine of the church had not been made at the time of writing /the first edition of Evangelische Evangelienauslegung was in 1942/ and this adequately explains our present lack of grasp of the issue as well.[2]

We have now set forth the foundations of Augustine's position as it relates to his hermeneutics. We turn now to some brief inquiries exploring related categories and making some further appraisals.

On the relation of faith to understanding, Augustine does employ the faith--understanding sequence, as in this tractate:

> Dost thou wish to understand? Believe. For God has said by the prophet: "Except ye believe, ye shall not understand."...Therefore do not seek to

---

[1]Ebeling, "Hermeneutik," 249.

[2]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 124-126.

> understand in order to believe, but believe that thou mayest understand.[1]

The ambiguity of the crede ut intelligam in Augustine of which Karl Barth speaks[2] may be seen in some of the following lines of the tractate, where belief and obedience are commingled:

> Therefore when I would counsel the obedience of believing toward the possibility of understanding, and say that our Lord Jesus Christ has added this very thing in the following sentence, we find Him to have said, "If any man be willing to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." What is "he shall know?" It is the same thing as "he shall understand." But what is "If any man be willing to do His will?" It is the same thing as to believe.[3]

The crucial distinction lies in the definition of faith, and the excerpt above only partially reflects the possibilities open to faith within the total context of Augustinianism.

There is a running thread of double distinctions in Augustine. One of these is the distinction between plain passages of Scripture, easily interpreted, and obscure passages which are difficult to comprehend. Augustine has an interesting justification for this difference in form:

> The Holy Spirit has, with admirable wisdom and care for our welfare, so arranged the Holy Scriptures as by the plainer passages to satisfy our hunger, and by the more obscure to stimulate our appetite. For

---

[1]Augustine Tractate on John 7:14-18 xxix.6.

[2]Karl Barth, Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, trans. Ian W. Robertson (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 58.

[3]Augustine Tractate on John 7:14-18 xxix.6.

> almost nothing is dug out of those obscure passages which may not be found set forth in the plainest language elsewhere.[1]

From this we may conclude that the Scripture will explain itself from the clearer passages' being applied to the less clear and the obscure. But the existing literal-figurative dichotomy is not absent in Augustine, nor negated absolutely by him. He relies on that old dictum of the "letter that kills" with his special application:

> For that teaching which brings to us the command to live in chastity and righteousness is "the letter that killeth," unless accompanied with "the spirit that giveth life." For that is not the sole meaning of the passage, "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life," which merely prescribes that we should not take in the literal sense any figurative phrase which in the proper meaning of its words would produce only nonsense, but should consider what else it signifies, nourishing the inner man by our spiritual intelligence, since "being carnally-minded is death, whilst to be spiritually-minded is life and peace."[2]

In contradistinction to the emphasis on the <u>forms</u> of letter and spirit, which led to a justification of extremes of allegory, Augustine "separated letter and spirit not formally but according to content-- by which he intended a distinction between a literal and a spiritual understanding."[3] This emphasis on the content develops into a healthy respect for the meaning which the author intended, rather than what the interpreter puts into the passage:

---

[1]Augustine <u>On Christian Doctrine</u> ii.6.

[2]Augustine <u>On the Spirit and the Letter</u> ii.6.

[3]Headley, <u>Luther's View</u>, 22.

> For if he takes up rashly a meaning which the author whom he is reading did not intend, he often falls in with other statements which he cannot harmonize with this meaning. And if he admits that these statements are true and certain, then it follows that the meaning he put upon the former passage cannot be the true one: and so it comes to pass, one can hardly tell how, that, out of love for his own opinion, he begins to feel more angry with Scripture than he is with himself.[1]

The close relationship of Luther to Augustine in this matter of the proper interpretation of 2 Cor. 3:6 and of letter and spirit seen from the point of view of content is ably appraised by Ebeling.[2]

In spite of these more clearly defined distinctions in the interpretation of Scripture, which seem to promise a more historical and more generally understandable hermeneutic, Augustine permits at times the perpetuation of the idea of esoteric understanding, given to some, withheld from others. Thus:

> Consider, moreover, the style in which Sacred Scripture is composed,--how accessible it is to all men, though its deeper mysteries are penetrable to very few. The plain truths which it contains it declares in the artless language of familiar friendship to the hearts both of the unlearned and of the learned; but even the truths which it veils in symbols it does not set forth in stiff and stately sentences, which a mind somewhat sluggish and uneducated might shrink from approaching, as a poor man shrinks from the presence of the rich; but by the condescension of its style, it invites all not only to be fed with the truth which is plain, but

---

[1]Augustine On Christian Doctrine i.37. v. also Grant, Bible in the Church, 93.

[2]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., v. especially pp. 287-89.

also to be exercised by the truth which is concealed.[1]

In the Confessions we find the same perspective:

> For now those things which heretofore appeared incongruous to me in the Scripture, and used to offend me, having heard divers of them expounded reasonably, I referred to the depth of the mysteries, and its authority seemed to me all the more venerable and worthy of religious belief, in that, while it was visible for all to read it, it reserved the majesty of its secret within its profound significance, stooping to all in the great plainness of its language and lowliness of its style, yet exercising the application of such as are not light of heart; that it might receive all into its common bosom, and through narrow passages waft over some few towards Thee.[2]

The mystical element in the communication of this divine truth may be understood as an inner light:

> For the word of truth is applied to man externally by the ministry of a bodily voice, but yet "neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." Man indeed hears the speaker, be he man or angel, but in order that he may perceive and know that what is said is true, his mind is internally besprinkled with that light which remains for ever, and which shines even in darkness.[3]

That the inner light does not come by some transcendent, mysterious working would seem to be inferred from what we would designate vocation. E. Hoffmann puts it this way:

> The interpreter must himself have a gift which comes from God, but he does not possess this gift until he

---

[1]Augustine Letter to Volusianus cxxxvii.18.

[2]Augustine Confessions vi.5.

[3]Augustine On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism i.37.

> shares it out: through being passed on it is increased. The Christian is thus for Augustine something active. He must be active, in order to be an instrument for God's activity. The working of God affects only the doing of something. God does not cease to give us the gift, if we apply it.[1]

For any one concerned with the vexing question of appraising the purported Platonism or Neo-Platonism of Augustine, the foregoing section must have dropped numerous clues to be seized upon more or less avidly. In this seething mass of words and ideas in Augustine there is something suspicious about the very friendliness toward allegory, the dubious reality of history, the duality of interpretations, the very mention of letter and spirit. We may add to this data quite consciously a repeated stress on seeing the Truth, a concept open to Platonizing charges. Thus, in the Confessions:

> And thus, with the flash of a trembling glance, it arrived at that which is. And then I saw Thy invisible things understood by the things that are made. But I was not able to fix my gaze thereon; and my infirmity being beaten back, I was thrown again on my accustomed habits, carrying along with me naught but a loving memory thereof, and an appetite for what I had, as it were, smelt the odour of, but was not yet able to eat.[2]

Granted the possibility of Augustine's being carried away by a flight of oratorical indulgence, the emphasis on seeing in his exposition of John 5:19 is also very much to the point here:

> There is that which thou mayest see, but not that whereby thou canst see. Thou didst not believe

---

[1] E. Hoffmann, "Augustine's Philosophy of History," 184.

[2] Augustine Confessions vii, 23.

> me before that there is that which thou mayest see: thou art now, as by the guidance of reason, brought to it: thou hast drawn near, strained thine eyes to see it, throbben, and shrunk back.[1]

The ascent of the soul toward God, the "stretching" away from the body, is accentuated in another tractate:

> We may, in some measure stretch out ourselves, not against God, but towards Him, and lift up our soul, pouring it out above us, like the Psalmist, to whom it was said, "Where is thy God?" "On these things," saith he, " I meditated, and poured out my soul above me." Therefore let us lift up our soul to God, not against God; for this also is said, "To Thee, O Lord, I have lifted up my soul." And let us lift it up with His own assistance, for it is heavy. And from what cause is it heavy? Because the body which is corrupt weighs down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle depresses the mind while meditating on many things.[2]

The soul-body dichotomy continues in the following paragraphs of the tractate also. So Warfield concludes that "one of the main features of Augustine's philosophy" is "his assertion that the objects of sensible and intellectual perception alike have indubitable objectivity," and that the soul "is connected with the sensible world by the external senses; on the other hand, with the intelligible world by the sensus intimus which is the intellect."[3] The argument is supported by citing Augustine's Against the Academics.

---

[1]Augustine Tractate on John 5:19 xviii.11.

[2]Augustine Tractate on John 5:19-40 xxiii.5. v. also Burnaby, Amor Dei, 26.

[3]Warfield, Studies, 141.

In his careful and restrained analysis of Platonism in Augustine's philosophy of history, E. Hoffmann concedes a number of correlations. In continuity with several elements dealt with above, this extract is relevant:

> But in a deeper sense Augustine is a Platonist. Neither as a Platonizing Christian nor as a Christian adept of Platonism, but as the Plato of Christianity. What is fundamental in Plato's philosophical thought lies in the fact that he makes the starting-point of his whole philosophy the conviction that there is one unconditionally right way of thinking; hence only one (for truth is one); hence outside of this only false ways.[1]

Hoffmann's judgment relates to epistemology directly, but we cannot ignore here the possibility of ontological involvement as well. E. Thestrup Pedersen makes the unqualified judgment that neo-Platonic ontology is "indubitably" /ubestridelig/ present in Augustine.[2] In a closely related judgment, Patterson acknowledges a similarity in cosmology between Augustine and his Greek Christian contemporaries (already seen to be under Platonic influence), but wisely qualifies and corrects a too-radical application of this judgment by adding that he holds this cosmology "in a quite different context."[3]

We must now attempt some sort of resolution of this issue and make some provisional conclusions. Let us add one further statement,

---

[1]Hoffmann, "Augustine's Philosophy of History," 178-79.

[2]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 122.

[3]Patterson, God and History, 118.

that of Thomas F. Torrance:

> In the Augustinian tradition the universe was regarded as a sacramental macrocosm in which the physical and visible were held to be the counterpart in time to eternal and heavenly patterns. As such the world had significance only so far as it reflected or illustrated eternal patterns, but it was not worthy of attention in itself.[1]

We conclude that, in laying the stress on "sacramental" we avert the possibility of ascribing to Augustine a pure idealism. This, too, gives the new context for the Greek Christian cosmology for Augustine. The world is not a perverse riddle, a secret which frustrates man in his search for understanding. The world has become a sign, a sacrament, through which we come to know the eternal Truth, and it has become this through the incarnation in that world of the Word of Truth, Jesus Christ. As the world is macrocosmic sacrament, so in microcosmic man is found also the revealing sign, and man is seen as in Augustine's Confessions as potentially the seeker, who has sought not unsuccessfully, but to the finding of his rest in God.

The controversy as to the role of philosophical presuppositions in Augustine is as endless as that on the proper role of philosophy in theology. Carl Michalson can defend the general principle of the use of philosophy along with its place in Augustine, saying:

> If theology is separable from other spheres it is insulated against their judgment....One of the rewards

---

[1]Thomas F. Torrance, "The Influence of Reformed Theology on Modern Scientific Method," Dialog, II (Winter, 1963), 42.

> of that risk [i.e. of openness to philosophy] is that the methodological lines by which theological perspective is communicated to other spheres are at least kept open.[1]

But Rudolf Hermann obviously intends to speak pejoratively when he says: "Aber Latomus kann eben, im Gefolge Augustins und der Scholastik, nicht anders als anthropologisch-metaphysisch denken."[2] Whether we accept the one conclusion or other, the fact remains that a very high level of some kind of ratiocination is evident in Augustine, that whatever his thinking is called, it is highly sophisticated. His own earlier doubt and skepticism is deepened in his personal and professional life. Löwith's words are effective in analyzing this activity:

> The Christian search for redemptive truth and certainty of faith is incompatible with classical irony, skeptical suspense, and ataraxy. Doubt, too, has become more total and intense through Christianity than it ever was in antiquity. Augustine, Pascal, Luther, Kierkegaard--they all seek and search and doubt in a new, passionate way. Classical skepticism discussed rational contradictions with regard to their truth or falsity; Christian and modern doubt refers to the question whether man, who sins and errs, can be "in the

---

[1]Carl Michalson, Wordly Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 58.

[2]Rudolf Hermann, "Zur Kontroverse zwischen Luther und Latomus," Luther and Melanchthon, ed. Vilmos Vajta (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 117.

truth" at all.[1]

It follows from this conclusion, as E. Hoffmann says, that communion with God remained as a problem after Augustine.[2] Another aspect of Augustine's sophisticated approach to his problem is what J. N. D. Kelly calls "the subtlety and fertility of his...imagination."[3] It is a truism that such unusual gifts may pose a hazard for the owner, and in our view they play a major role in the difficulty with which subsequent theologians apprehended Augustine in all his variety of thought and expression.

Farrar points out the spectrum of followers of Augustine, and it is evident that only eclecticism could account for his being held in equal honor by such extremes as this: "By his dialectic skill and speculative curiosity he became the father of scholasticism, and at the same time he gave an impulse to the medieval mystics by his spiritual ardour."[4] That eclecticism of the Reformers over against Augustine is undoubtedly in the second line outlined above. The manifestation in Augustine of "living contact of...whole being with

---

[1]Karl Löwith, Nature, History, and Existentialism, ed. Arnold Levison (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 123.

[2]Hoffmann, "Augustine's Philosophy of History," 179.

[3]Kelly, "Bible and Latin Fathers," 53.

[4]Farrar, History, 235.

the inspired words," in the phrase of Dean Church quoted by Farrar[1] is without question the trait which endears Augustine to the evangelicals. Headley applies this principle to Luther, maintaining that it is "personal faith and the religious content in the life of the great Christian thinker" which appeals to Luther.[2] Such statements are commonplace in Luther studies. Pauck puts it: "in his /Luther's/ opinion, Augustine was the Scriptural theologian who had the right comprehension of the nature of sin and grace."[3] Moreover, Melanchthon says "Luther follows him /Augustine/ throughout in his commentary on Galatians."[4] On his own part as well, Melanchthon commends Augustine:

> Saint Augustine, a man of both singular genius and great experience in sacred matters, said that the apostle does not desire a man of acute understanding but only an attentive hearer. He who has been infected with the opinions of carnal philosophy does not acknowledge the wisdom of Paul. Accordingly, you will see to it that you bring to this wisdom, first, a mind that is pure, and then also one that is free from the opinions of the crowd.[5]

---

[1]Farrar, History, 241.

[2]Headley, Luther's View, 171.

[3]Luther, Romans, xlvi.

[4]Philip Melanchthon, Selected Writings, ed. Elmer Ellsworth Flack and Lowell J. Satre (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), p. 74. /Selections/

[5]Melanchthon, Selections, 41.

As we might expect, not all students concur in the place which Augustine deserves. Portalié, for example, takes pains to qualify his own fine survey of the work of Augustine with the statement: "The strictly exegetical work of Augustine does not equal, then, either in scope or in scientific character, that of St. Jerome."[1] Oberman is more expansive in stating that "all medieval thinkers" followed him "with varying degrees of fidelity."[2] The amazing number of references to Augustine in Miss Smalley's work is self-evident proof of the dominance of Augustine in the medieval church. Inclusion of much of Augustine's commentary in the Glossa Ordinaria, which was generally accepted as auctoritas, attests further to this claim of pervasive influence.

Augustine must have been more fortunate in his friends than were some other interpreters. At least, mercifully, certain dubious aspects of his work, such as the possibility for unlimited individualistic interpretations of equal authority which he opened up, were either overlooked or ignored or forgotten.[3] Perhaps the reason for his wide acceptation was, as Burleigh has said, that he left "himself ample

---

[1]Portalié, Guide, 123-24. v. also Kelly, "Bible and Latin Fathers," 52.

[2]Oberman, Forerunners, 25.

[3]Kelly, "Bible and Latin Fathers," 53.

room in the interpretation of Scripture."[1] Perhaps also it was the "common-sense" perspective of the West in matters of doctrine that decried too great subtleties[2] and the strange ability of the medieval peoples to combine the apparent contradictions such as the literal and symbolical in their approach to phenomena and in their approach to art and literature.[3]

## The Problem of Words and Things

Hilary of Poitiers is one of those little-known transitional figures who are vital links in the development of Western thought. He was known to and appreciated by Luther both directly through readings and indirectly by citations in Peter Lombard's Sentences.[4] Melanchthon was somewhat dubious regarding his interpretations as indicated here: "Haec satis elegantur Hilarius, nescio etiam, an satis probe."[5]

---

[1]Burleigh, City of God, 109.

[2]J. N. D. Kelly,"The Bible and the Latin Fathers," in Nineham, Church's Use of the Bible, p. 55.

[3]Barfield, Saving the Appearances, 73.

[4]WA 58/1, p. 94 catalogues these references: "Hilarius ist gut," TR 1, 106; "Augustinus et Hilarius lucidius scripsissent, alios vero maximo cum iudicio esse legendos," TR 4, 536; "Multa praeclara de trinitate et iustificatione scripserunt," TR 5, 154, 415; "Hilarius verus luctator adversus haereticos scripserunt," TR 2, 344. Again p.98: "/Lombardus/ Perlegit omnes scribentes, Hilarium" etc. TR 2, 517.

[5]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 205.

Hilary's "hearty, though not indiscriminate, acceptance of the method /of Origen/ led to his general adoption in the West."[1] On the other hand, "his sense of the value of Scripture is heightened by his belief in the sacredness of language. Names belong inseparably to the things which they signify; words are themselves a revelation."[2]

Hilary applied this to the problems posed by the Arians:

> Thus the name which expresses His nature proves the truth of our confession of the faith. For the name, which indicates any single substance, points out also any other substance of the same kind; and, in this instance, there are not two substances but one substance, of the one kind. For the Son of God is God; this is the truth expressed in His name. The one name does not embrace two Gods; for the one name God is the name of one indivisible nature. For since the Father is God and the Son is God, and that name which is peculiar to the Divine nature is inherent in Each, therefore the Two are One.[3]

Thus again: "Scripture makes no distinction, by difference of name, between Their natures, but discriminates between Themselves."[4] The result of such a view is that Hilary basically opposes the use of any technical terms in theology and prefers to employ those which have their basis in Scripture. He is keen to perceive and explicate the

---

[1]St. Hilary of Poitiers, Selected Works, Vol. IX, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, trans. E. W. Watson et al., ed. W. Sanday (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. lxi.

[2]Hilary, Selected Works, lxii.

[3]Hilary, De Trinitate vii.13.

[4]Hilary, De Trinitate iv.29.

problem posed by human language and analogy:

> We are well aware that neither the speech of men nor the analogy of human nature can give us a full insight into the things of God. The ineffable cannot submit to the bounds and limits of definition; that which is spiritual is distinct from every class or instance of bodily things. Yet, since our subject is that of heavenly natures, we must employ ordinary natures and ordinary speech as our means of expressing what our mind apprehends; a means no doubt unworthy of the majesty of God, but forced upon us by feebleness of our intellect, which can use only our own circumstances and our own words to convey to others our perceptions and our conclusions.[1]

"God cannot be known except by devotion"[2] but the heretics force men to do otherwise.

> The errors of heretics and blasphemers force us to deal with unlawful matters, to scale perilous heights, to speak unutterable words, to trespass on forbidden ground. Faith ought in silence to fulfil the commandments, worshipping the Father, reverencing with Him the Son, abounding in the Holy Ghost, but we must strain the poor resources of our language to express thoughts too great for words. The errors of others compels us to err in daring to embody in human terms truths which ought to be hidden in the silent veneration of the heart.[3]

Hilary was a pioneer in the attempt to work through to a better understanding of the function of human words and the human task of understanding through words. His declension to the old allegorical mode indicates the difficulty of making the break with that formidably

---

[1]Hilary De Trinitate iv.2.; cf. i.19.

[2]Hilary De Trinitate xi.42.

[3]Hilary De Trinitate ii.2.

strong and appealing method. Indeed, even in our own century Hendrik Kraemer can make this statement:

> It seems that it is well-nigh superhuman to adopt and practise obediently Biblical epistemology, because it so rarely happens that scholastic epistemology is radically dethroned, both with orthodox and liberal theologians.[1]

The two-fold difficulty of dealing with the nature of being and the development of self-consciousness is succinctly stated by Friedrich Gogarten:

> According to Julius Stenzel's analysis of the metaphysics of the Greeks, the meaning of "being" preceded the division into subject and object. Being meant at one and the same time both the objective reality that confronts the consciousness and the reality that supports this consciousness....Thus man in the old era could not ask questions about himself except as he assumed that he was a being who received his being from the world. As the New Testament writers say of those who live prior to and without faith, he was "of" the world.[2]

The major thrust in Hilary away from the essentialist domination is toward the underscoring of Biblical words as special, as unique language, distinct from man and his language. In the context in which he wrote "the words of God are realities, not mere words"[3] Luther specifically cited Hilary's works approvingly. Thus the words

---

[1]Hendrik Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 344.

[2]Friedrich Gogarten, The Reality of Faith: The Problem of Subjectivism in Theology, trans. Carl Michalson, et. al., (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 33.

[3]Luther, Am. Ed., I, 21-22. V. also XXXII, 243-44.

of Scripture, especially the names, the nouns, take on a non-significative, self-contained importance. These conclusions are not primarily affirmations on the nature of revelation as such, but are analyses of the nature of language with the objective of aiding interpretation.

The work of Anselm of Canterbury several centuries later may be seen as a development in a similar vein. Marcia L. Colish has masterfully analyzed Anselm's epistemology in her book, The Mirror of Language.[1] Professor Colish traces Anselm's grammatical approach back to Lanfranc and sets it in contrast to the syllogistic proof. Those who hold this type of view display "their confidence in the significative power of the noun by assuming that definition in itself is somehow not only explanatory but intellectually convincing."[2] This mode of procedure, or "equipollent proof" eventuates in the statement: A=B=C=D. As Miss Colish describes the Anselmic method, "The use of definition is basic . . .in the sense of the quest for names of God that possess rectitude. To find these names, Anselm moves from one definition to another by equipollency."[3]

What is so very important in this summary analysis of Anselm's

---

[1]Marcia L. Colish, The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

[2]Colish, Language, 107.

[3]Colish, Language, 134.

methodology here is the presupposing of A. The conclusion D is contingent on the rectitude of A. We can progress readily from this A of nominal definition to Professor Torrance's comment that in Anselm "the word of God is not in the likeness of the creature but the creature in the likeness of God's Word."[1] Expressed in a total theological view, the foregoing concepts can be seen embodied in the Anselmic "Fides quaerens intellectum."

Abelard may well have begun with an unquestioned faith as did Anselm[2] and have proceeded to defend and understand that faith through rational processes, but either his personal arrogance or his critical stance aroused fears and opposition. He opposed the naive ascription of equivalence to words and things, and pointed out the arbitrary character of meanings given to words, as well as the logical confusion of words and concepts in much argumentation.[3] To avoid this type of error he espoused a rigorous logical analysis of language and grammar. The ultimate effect of this method was to question seriously the dominant realism by the affirmation that universals are

---

[1]T. F. Torrance, "Scientific Hermeneutics according to St. Thomas Aquinas," Journal of Theological Studies, XIII (October, 1962), 278.

[2]Smalley, Use of the Bible, 144; Gustav E. Weigel and Arthur G. Madden, Religion and the Knowledge of God (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961), p. 103.

[3]Meyrick H. Carré, Realists and Nominalists (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 65.

neither words nor things but sermones, concepts.[1] The door to Nominalism thus set ajar was to be opened wide subsequently by Ockham. We turn to Copleston for a judgment as to Abelard's responsibility in this wrestling with the problem of the universals:

> If we wish, with John of Salisbury, to call Abelard a "nominalist", we must recognize at the same time that his "nominalism" is simply a denial of ultra-realism and and assertion of the distinction between the logical and real orders, without involving any denial of the objective foundation of the universal concept. The Abelardian doctrine is an adumbration, in spite of some ambiguous language, of the developed theory of "moderate realism".[2]

What insight have we gained from these sketches on the relation of word and thing? Aside from the obvious implications for philosophy and systematic theology, we conclude that Abelard manifests yet another stage in the see-saw struggle to gain a viable mode of understanding concrete man, his language and his religious experience. This means that words are not viewed as pure form in the realist context, and that man begins to be seen as standing somehow subjectively over against both words and things.

It is appropriate now to look at Thomas Aquinas from a new perspective, inquiring into some of his theories of knowledge as they relate ultimately to hermeneutics. Unfortunately, there have been so

---

[1]Carré, Realists and Nominalists, 60, 65, 106-07.

[2]Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1963), 2/I, p. 172.

many and so varied interpreters of St. Thomas that any analysis is subject to the accusation of being eclectic with a bias. J. A. Dorner blandly stated that Thomas was a skeptical Nominalist,[1] Professor Torrance sees him influenced by the Pseudo-Dionysius in a crucial point.[2] Augustine and Aristotle are seen as in continual interplay in varying degree in the thought of St. Thomas. For our purposes here, however, there is no absolute need to come up with the final judgment as to the precise position of the great Scholastic. Rather we may note the play of elements in the work of this complex thinker, and tacitly accept Miss Colish's appraisal:

> Despite the extensive amount of space he devotes to topics related to this problem /of the role of signs in the knowledge of God/, Thomas never compiles all the relevant materials into one work, nor does he put forth his theory with either economy or overtness.[3]

It appears clear enough that Thomas rejects Augustine's illumination theory of knowledge and thereby places himself closer to the Reformers.[4] This done, he must resolve the remaining problem of knowledge, by determining the roles of sense and intellection. Thomas

---

[1]J. A. Dorner, The Person of Christ, Div. 2, Vol. i: History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ, trans. D. W. Simon (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1862), pp. 371-72.

[2]Torrance, Journal of Theological Studies, XIII, No. 3, 277.

[3]Colish, Language, 222.

[4]Torrance, Journal of Theological Studies, XIII, No. 3, 270-71.

assigns specific, limited roles to each function, and thus points out to us the growing awareness of the necessity of a truly scientific, ultimately inductive, relation to things. Carré summarizes, "Intellect and sense are distinct and have different spheres. Understanding cannot know bodies, nor sense essences or forms."[1] Torrance confirms thus: "Intellective knowledge is dependent upon the sensitive as the sensitive is upon the intellective. In this mutual dependence the intellect is both passive and active."[2]

Now this principle works out neatly enough when applied to matters in the realm of nature, but we discover quickly that the knowledge of God is sharply detached from such a psychological scheme as that above. Rather, playing on the distinction between God's "essence" and His "person" Thomas concludes, that there can be no communication from God directly in word or speech, only indirectly.[3] Consistently, Thomas maintains that the Scripture, and only the Scripture of all writings, has a double sense.[4] As Professor Torrance admirably summarizes, this means that:

---

[1]Carré, Realists and Nominalists, 85.

[2]Torrance, Journal of Theological Studies, XIII, No. 3, 267. C. 262.

[3]Torrance, Journal of Theological Studies, XIII, No. 3, 273-74.

[4]Charles Donahue, "Patristic Exegesis: Summation," Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 80.

> Only metaphorically can we take the words of scripture to be the word of God. Now this has a decided advantage in directing attention to Christ himself as the one word of God behind all the speech of holy scripture, but the way in which Aquinas thinks of the relation of scripture to that word leads into a highly intellectualistic interpretation of it in which the meaning is inevitably schematized to the philosophical thought-forms brought to its understanding.[1]

Something of the deficiency of his approach stems from his failure to apply the matter of the Incarnation to this problem.[2]

From the work of St. Thomas and onward it is evident that two ineluctable factors have been established in the processes of Western theological inquiry: one, thinking man can not be regarded as a neutral element in the knowing process, and the other, Christian man, quite specifically the man of faith, faces a special problem as he examines his own knowledge of God. We quote the words of Walter Ong:

> This gift from God, which is the gift called Christian faith, comes into play in every Christian and sets the mind to a task beyond itself. It thereby establishes the mind of the believer in a lifelong state of real tension. An acute awareness of the presence of this tension brought Thomas to examine in terms of a detailed study of human intellection the condition of man consequent upon Christian belief.[3]

---

[1]Torrance, Journal of Theological Studies, XIII, No. 3, 280-81. V. also 266, 269.

[2]Torrance, Journal of Theological Studies, XIII, No. 3, 280.

[3]Walter J. Ong, The Barbarian Within (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 109-10.

Thomas' situation, as Professor Torrance explicitly states, is within the well-known hermeneutical circle,[1] a circle drawn from God to man and again to God.

## Late Medieval Developments

The concluding section of this historical survey will deal briefly with three figures: Nicholas of Lyra (ob. 1340), Gabriel Biel (ob. 1495), and Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples, perhaps better known as Faber Stapulensis (1455?-1536). The brevity of this report should not be construed as giving minimal importance to these scholars. In fact, the section on Lyra is painfully inadequate to summarize the wealth of references particularly in Luther's works to this towering figure. It is, true, nevertheless that these men have not engaged the broad attention which has been accorded other exegetes earlier and later in the history of hermeneutics. The problem with Biel is that he is marked at the outset as a scholastic theologian, "the last of the scholastics," and little analysis has been made of his work from the perspective of exegetical or hermeneutical study. The work of Heiko Oberman is of tremendous importance in highlighting the key position of Biel in late-medieval theology and Biblical interpretation.[2] The situation with

---

[1]Torrance, "Scientific Hermeneutics..." JTS, October, 1962, pp. 287-88.

[2]We refer particularly to Oberman's, The Harvest of Medieval Theology, previously cited.

Faber is quite a different matter again. Here is a fascinating character whose acknowledged relation to both the Wittenberg and Genevan reformations has never become of general concern to the academic searchers. A survey of the indices to secondary sources on the Reformation will confirm this judgment.

Each of these men has representative importance in this presentation. Without limiting our inquiry later, we may at the outset simplify by citing Lyra as an example of the results of new contacts with and new learning from Jewish scholarship; Biel gives us a picture of the Occamist wrestling manfully with the problem of the relationship of Scripture, tradition and Church, and Faber typifies the humanist exegete with strong evangelical leanings.

The Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra is so highly esteemed as to be denominated "the Jerome of the fourteenth century" by Farrar[1] and "the best-equipped bliblical scholar in the Middle Ages."[2] His studies had made him aware of Tychonius' seven rules, which he apparently discovered through Isidore of Seville, not Augustine.[3] A more distinctive component of his background was his study of Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, 1040-1105) from whom he derived a strong sense of the priority of the literal sense of Scripture and the necessity of

---

[1]Farrar, History, 274.

[2]Reported in Oberman, Forerunners, 286.

[3]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 302, n. 35. Pedersen cites Lyra, I fol. 3H and 4A, B, C and D.

applying linguistic studies. The new interest in the study of the Hebrew language and in conferring with Jewish rabbis on matters of translation and interpretation, after some difficult exchanges, reaches its zenith in the Reformation era.[1] These Hebrew studies, however, create an awareness of textual difficulties which are not to be gainsaid. Lyra concludes:

> Ulterius considerandum, quod sensus literalis...videtur multum obfuscatus diebus modernis, partim scriptorum vitio...partim imperitia aliquorum correctorum, qui in pluribus locis fecerunt puncta ubi non debent fieri... partim ex modo translationis nostrae (sc. Vulgata) quae in multis locis aliter habet quam libri hebraici.[2]

It is obvious that the work of the interpreter will incorporate critical study of the text in its original language.

On the basis of the hebraic tradition through Rashi and the Christian tradition through St. Thomas, Lyra argues for a literal interpretation of the Scripture.[3] A very promising progression in this mode of dealing with texts is the expansion of the material beyond a word or a few words to the dealing with a whole passage.[4] In a most significant judgment he concludes that doctrine is to be established

---

[1]E. C. Blackman, Biblical Interpretation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 71.

[2]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 304. n. 43. Pedersen cites Lyra I, fol. 3 G.

[3]Oberman, Forerunners, 286.

[4]Blackman, Biblical Interpretation, 115.

only on the basis of literal interpretation: "cum ex solo sensu literali et non ex mystico posset argumentum fieri ad probandum."[1]

Any expectation of an unqualified literal-historical interpretation in Lyra would be premature. Although his Postillae demonstrate more of the ascendant literal interpretation, Lyra did also write the Moralitates, and some systematic statements on exegesis which are not only equivocal but definitely traditional in propounding the two senses of Scripture. E. Thestrup Pedersen calls attention to this statement:

> Secundum igitur primam significationem quae est per voces accipitur sensus litteralis seu historicus. Secundum vero aliam significationem, quae est per ipsa res accipitur sensus mysticus seu spiritualis.[2]

Ebeling concludes further:

> Auch Lyra zB versteht eine Reihe von Pss litteraliter Christologisch und will mit der historischen Deutung anderer Pss (etwa auf David) nicht das Recht einer übertragenden Anwendung auf Christus bestreiten. Eine prinzipielle Reduktion auf den sensus litteralis historicus und Eliminierung jeder darüber hinaus gehenden mystischen (prophetischen, allegorischen) Deutung ist für die mittelalterliche H. unvorstellbar.[3]

In view of this double system it is somewhat easier to account for what appear to be discrepancies in the criticisms of Lyra. Oberman,

---

[1]Farrar, History, 276. No reference is given for the citation.

[2]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 300, n. 18. Pedersen cites Lyra I, fol. 3E.

[3]Ebeling, "Hermeneutik," 250.

for example, can say with approval that Lyra "programmatically opposed current allegoristic interpretations of the Bible."[1] But Grant observes "even after the need for allegorization seemed gone, Nicholas of Lyra set forth the spiritual as well as the literal sense in his commentaries."[2] Luther combines the uncertainty in himself in the often-quoted words, "Lyram contemnebam, quamquam post viderem eum valere ad historiam."[3] Although Rupp's terminology is not precise, he supports the contention of allegorization in the words "a literal interpretation of the Psalms would leave many of them baffling indeed, so that even Lyra himself made frequent use of tropology."[4]

The impossibility of a clean break with the traditional mode of interpretation is indicated further by Lyra's perpetuation in practice, and his defence in principle of the famous Quadriga, or four-fold method of interpretation. Lyra transmits the classic terminology:

> Qui (sc. sensus mysticus seu spiritualis) est triplex in generali: quia si res significatae per voces referantur ad significandum ea, quae sunt in noua lege credenda, sic accipitur sensus allegoricus. Si autem referantur ad significandum ea quae per nos sunt agenda, sic est sensus moralis vel tropologicus. Si autem referantur ad significandum ea, quae sunt speranda in beatitudine futura, sic est sensus anagogicus...Unde

---

[1]Oberman, Forerunners, 305, n. 6.

[2]Grant, Bible in the Church, 108.

[3]W. A., T. R. 1, 44, no. 116; v. also 7, no. 18.

[4]Gordon Rupp, The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), p. 133.

> versus: Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria;
> Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.[1]

In his characteristic metaphorical style Luther accuses Aquinas and Lyra of disseminating the Quadriga and so rending Christ's garments.[2] Even so, granted our dissatisfaction with the lack of thoroughness in effecting a change in exegetical methods, and the retrenching from forward positions, we must ponder and give credence to Farrar's judgment that "he did more than any other writer to break down the tyranny of ecclesiastical tradition, and to overthrow the blind belief in the bad method of many centuries."[3]

Lyra's deference to Mother Church seems to be another evidence of the weakness of his convictions concerning his fresh insights on Scriptural interpretation. E. Thestrup Pedersen notes how he submits his teachings humbly /ydmygt/ to the correction of the Church:

> Nihil intendo dicere assertiue seu determinatiue, nisi quantum ad ea quae manifeste determinata sunt per sacram scripturam vel ecclesiae auctoritatem...omnia dicta et dicenda suppono correctioni sanctae matris ecclesiae.[4]

The exact signification of the "scripturam vel ecclesiae auctoritatem"

---

[1]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 301, n. 24. Pedersen cites Lyra I, fol. 3E. v. also Grant, Bible in the Church, 101.

[2]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 333.

[3]Farrar, History, 277.

[4]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 25. Pedersen cites Lyra, I, fol. 3H.

and particularly the significance of the "vel" appears ambiguous at the same time that it is singled out for study as a dominant motif in theology in the late Middle Ages. The example of Gabriel Biel in our next following section will elaborate on this issue. That Lyra's view of the church is not properly interpreted in terms of some Protestant stereotype of pre-Reformation interpretation is evidenced by the statement quoted by Oberman: /Lyra says/

> From this it is clear that the Church is not made up of men with reference to their authority and ecclesiastical or secular status. For many princes and popes and others of lesser office have been found to be apostates from the faith.[1]

However we may appraise Lyra, his successors for the next two centuries held him in high repute and perpetuated his influence. Harold J. Grimm reports that there were at least six editions of the Postilla during the period from 1471 to 1509 alone.[2] The mind-set which would not permit Lyra to make a full break with the scholastic chains[3] so far as the material was concerned undoubtedly operated also in the formal so that he left behind him, consciously, as Augustine had done, a system of interpretation.[4] The appeal of a tidy system to the lesser

---

[1]Oberman, Forerunners, 232. He is citing Biblia cum Postillis Nicolai Lyrae (Basel: 1498-1508), Vol. IV.

[2]Harold J. Grimm, The Reformation Era: 1500-1650 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1954), p. 53.

[3]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 134.

[4]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 10.

figures who followed him up until the time of the Reformation,[1] is quite natural.

The later humanists do not disappoint our expectations in their approval for Lyra. Reuchlin spoke of "the venerable father Nicolaus of Lyra, the common expositor of the Bible, ...approved as an irreproachable man by all faithful to Christ."[2] Although Erasmus does not seem to approve all that Lyra has said, he defends his right to say what he thinks, and attests further to the common acceptance of his works: "Nicholas of Lyra, a man surely not ignorant but well-informed, who dares to tutor Jerome and to tear apart many things hallowed by the consent of so many centuries."[3] In the wake of the humanists, Luther continues the insistence on the necessity of the knowledge of languages in their philology and their grammar, but he is not content with such literalistic and grammatical analyses alone, and criticizes Lyra and other hebraists if and when they content themselves with a simply grammatical exegesis.[4]

More basic than Luther's criticism of the humanist-grammatical exegesis in Lyra is the reformer's condemnation of his lingering scholasticism. Thus, in his commentary on Romans 3:5, after toying

---

[1]Farrar, History, 278.

[2]W. Schwarz, Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation: Some Reformation Controversies and their Background (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 88.

[3]Oberman, Forerunners, 311-12.

[4]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 422.

with the typical scholastic terminology of the justice and righteousness of God, and specifically Lyra's sense of sin contributing accidentally to the glory of God, Luther counters with the bold resolution of the problem in the text that it is to be resolved only by the interpretation of those who are in the Spirit.[1] He decries Lyra's statement that a knowledge of the opinion of philosophers concerning the nature of matter is necessary in order to understand the account of the creation.[2] Lyra's highly formal introduction to his study of Romans is contrasted by E. Thestrup Pedersen with Luther's launching "in medias res" in his commentary.[3] The element which seems to protect Lyra from Luther's absolute rejection as a scholastic appears to be the solid ground of exegesis which precedes the speculation and conclusions along scholastic lines.[4] It is too much to expect that Luther will overlook Lyra's traditional understanding of gospel and law. To Lyra, the gospel is a "lex seu doctrina."[5] Although this presupposition enables him to move on to the conclusion of an inspired total Scripture, in which both Testaments are on an equal plane, the corrupting perspective

---

[1]Luther, Romans, 78.

[2]Luther, Lenker I, 42.

[3]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 325.

[4]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 66-67.

[5]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 136. Pedersen cites Lyra Pars V, fol. 2A.

of that total scripture as entirely pedagogical is far from the mark of evangelical, Christocentric understanding of the revelation.[1]

As we move to consider Gabriel Biel we are tempted again to attempt to designate the origins or the causes of such a development in thought as he manifests. The fifteenth century was a strange admixture of hopes and despairs, of talk of the Golden Age and fears of utter ruin. The questing, fearless and disrespectful minds of humanists and Renaissance men had opened the flood-gates of criticism of the Church and its hallowed teachings, not, admittedly, to the degree which the next century would do this, but sufficient for widespread alarms. Conciliarism had been a precipitate in the problem of the roles of papacy and church, and there seems to have been a growing self-consciousness on the part of the doctores which posed a problem over against the more insitutionalized theologians of the hierarchy and the monastery.

Against this background it is tempting to label Biel so staunch a conservative that he is better denominated an obscurantist. We might draw such an inference from the appraisal of Robert Stupperich:

> /Biel's/ theology had a mild, conciliatory tone, but it did not succeed in pointing out new ways and goals. Nothing about the current forms was upset; his intent was simply to gain from them an intrinsic meaning and to give them a deeper interpretation. Biel contented himself with preserving the tradition, cultivating the

---

[1]Pedersen, Skriftfortlker, 213-14. It is noteworthy that Lyra incorporates a view of progressive revelation in the relation of the Old and the New Testament.

> pious spirit, and striving after the original meaning of ideas.[1]

An extremely negative interpretation, even of Stupperich's statement, is belied by the seminal influence of Biel in his own time and to his immediate contemporaries, and in current reexamination. Stupperich does serve well to highlight two significant areas of concern with Biel, that of tradition and of a search for the original, intrinsic meaning of ideas. We may with just grounds attribute this latter to the mood of the humanist quest.

As a first instance of the concern to analyze the intrinsic meanings we note Biel in a sermon on predestination, following the late medieval search for the proper interpretation of Augustine, dealing with the caritas motif.[2] In his analysis of the Quadriga, Biel goes beyond a mere historical repristination to a new synthesis, incorporating the element of the work of the "doctores" alluded to above, and some emphasis on the historical. Here is Oberman's reporting, in brief, of Biel's point of view:

> Christ opens Scripture in four ways: (1) by his historical acts, Christ interprets Scripture typologically--defined by Biel as allegorical exegesis; (2) by his teaching, he expounds Scripture for his disciples historically; (3) by sending the Holy Spirit, he leads his disciples to a further and deeper understanding of Scripture; (4) finally Christ calls forth doctors to illuminate Holy Scripture not only historically and allegorically--as

---

[1]Stupperich, Melanchthon, 12-13.

[2]Oberman, Forerunners, 170-71.

> he himself had done--but now also anagogically and tropologically.[1]

In view of the Augustinian caritas emphasis and the methodology of the Quadriga, we anticipate a dependence on Scripture in Biel. If we read indifferently, without reference to context and qualifications, we might be led to think of Biel as a biblicist. Supporting such a conclusion would be isolated statements like Oberman's: "The beginning of faith is, therefore, assent to the veracity of the Christian faith, that is, assent to the Bible in its entirety."[2] There seems to be further corroboration in Biel's strong statement on the inspiration of the Scripture: "Scriptura autem canonica, utrumque videlicet testamentum, Spiritu sancto dictante et inspirante scripta creditur."[3] However, in view of other presuppositions in Biel, notably epistemological ones, a Biblical theology is not really conceivable or possible. This is, in reality, what is implied by the acceptance of the totality of Scripture. The parts of Scripture can not be submitted to criticism, and one passage cannot be used as the point of departure from which one may move to another passage or to some structure of a doctrinal system.[4]

---

[1]Oberman, Harvest, 395.

[2]Oberman, Harvest, 74.

[3]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 298, n. 14. Pedersen is citing Friedrich Kropatscheck, Das Schriftprinzip der lutherischen Kirche, I, p. 425, n. 1, without a primary source notation.

[4]Oberman, Harvest, 74.

In view of this assertion, Biel can hardly employ Augustine's caritas as the key to the Scripture, nor, for that matter, any other element of the canonical record.

Another potentially misleading idea is Biel's apparent Sola Scriptura principle. For example:

> Per verbum quod procedit de ore dei intelligitur omnis veritatis instructio, omnis consolatio, omnis exhortatio, omnis devotio que ex auditione, lectione, meditatione ac contemplatione divinorum eloquiorum procedit.... Verbum eterni dei sacra scriptura que ab ore dei procedit ipsius indicat voluntatem sine cuius agnitione nemo recte vivere potest. In hac discimus quantum deo appropinquamus et quantum a deo elongamur...que credenda et que speranda et cetera nostre saluti necessaria que omnia sola docet sacra scriptura.[1]

We can not totally ignore here the strongly tropological character of the application.[2] Of immediate importance is the question, if the Scripture is the inspired word of God unto salvation, and if the whole of the Scripture meaning can not be derived from the parts of the Scripture, how is man to know the truth and be assured of its authority? The answer bluntly put would be, in Biel's system, to accept the authority of the Church, to believe in the Tradition, in the broadest sense (which clearly includes the canonical Scripture), and so to be saved. In the manifest convergence of systematic and Biblical studies in Biel we see that the result is the subordination of Scripture and

---

[1]Oberman, Harvest, 394, n. 96; citing Lect. 71G.

[2]v. Oberman, Forerunners, 137.

Biblical studies, essentially, to studies of the doctrine of the Church and the doctrines of the Church. As Oberman indicates, Biel does not represent a continuation of the hermeneutical problems of the relation of inner and outer Scripture, or of res and signa. The issue now is, as we have said, that of Tradition, and it moves inexorably to pose the question of written and unwritten truth.[1]

We are witnessing here a transition from the mildness and ambiguity of Augustine's commovere to an explicit compellere and approbare, such as Oberman ascribes to d'Ailly.[2] And Biel concurs with this mutation, setting the Church above the Scripture: "Hoc enim modo ecclesia maioris est auctoritatis quam evangelium quia huius ecclesie evangelista scriptor evangelii est pars: totum autem maioris auctoritatis est sua parte."[3] Saving truth is interpreted by Tradition, and Tradition is seen as the history of biblical exposition:

> Sed haec opinio non acceptatur quia obviat scripture canonice sane intellecte et auctoritatibus sanctorum...veritas in evangelio continetur sane secundum sanctorum expositionem intellecto.[4]

It is impossible to be mollified by a statement like Oberman's that "Church and Scripture can never be contrasted as rivals" according to

---

[1]Oberman, Harvest, 404.

[2]Oberman, Harvest, 385.

[3]Oberman, Harvest, 398, n. 107; citing Lect. 22D.

[4]Oberman, Harvest, 398, n. 109; citing Lect. 37J.

Biel, "but Church and Scripture support each other in such a way that the Church has an ontological priority over Holy Scripture."[1]

An example of the dilemma that can be posed to a theologian by such an emphasis on the Church is Biel's one-time denial that the Church can remit sins to those in purgatory. On the discovery that the Church had spoken in the matter, Biel resolved the matter by reversing himself.[2] On the basis of such instances, Oberman concludes that not only Biel, but the late medieval nominalists as such were not anti-Catholic, but lined up with the Tridentine position.[3]

The devastating logical inference from all of this exaltation of the Church is for Biel that there exists an extra-Biblical tradition and that this unwritten tradition has the same authority as the Scripture.[4]

Such questions are ignored with typical humanist anti-scholasticism in the work of Faber Stapulensis.[5] The cry "ad fontes"

---

[1]Oberman, Harvest, 400.

[2]Oberman, Harvest, 405.

[3]Oberman, Harvest, 407.

[4]Oberman, Harvest, 398; Oberman, Forerunners, 58.

[5]In a marvellously acute and succinct statement, Henri Marrou incorporates the various elements which marked humanism: "Humanism, a movement by turns the ally and the foe of the Reformation, but itself quite independent...by several of its fundamental tendencies...was likely to recall attention to the work of the Fathers of the Church, and among them to that of St. Augustine: its mistrust of scholasticism and its 'barbarous jargon'...its love of antiquity, its return to the sources, to the original texts, to the great books, behind all the rubbish-heap of glosses and commentaries.." Marrou, Augustine, 166.

meant a concern for the Church,[1] but more centrally, a concern with the Scriptures themselves, and for Faber, a special concern for the writings of St. Paul. A listing of Faber's major works, in itself, indicates the Biblical tendency of his thought: The Psalterium Quincuplex, five different versions of the Latin Psalms and a critical commentary, 1509; commentary on St. Paul's Epistles, 1512; commentary on the Gospels, 1522; French translations of the New Testament and the Psalms, based on the Vulgate, 1523-25.[2] Böhmer concludes that not Luther, but Faber, published the first commentary on Paul based on the original text.[3] This meant ignoring the medieval commentaries, and not seeking so much to supplant the accepted glosses for the scholars as to impart the message of the text even to the common people.[4]

Given the correct, corrected, original text, the humanists could yet disagree as to the mode of understanding it. The difference between Erasmus and Faber is sharply stated by Gilmore:

> Lefebre represented a unique combination of the classical and the Christian elements. The philological tradition

---

[1]Marrou mentions a seldom-cited work of Faber's, a group of patristic texts published in 1498, a full decade before his work on the Psalms, with the title "Life-giving theology," whose inscription, Cibus solidus, indicated his prejudice. Marrou, Augustine, 166.

[2]Grimm, Reformation Era, 66-67.

[3]Heinrich Böhmer, Luther in Light of Recent Research, trans. Carl F. Huth, Jr. (New York: The Christian Herald, 1916), p. 265.

[4]Grimm, Reformation Era, 67.

> as established by Valla and carried on by the great work of Erasmus and others presumed that the exercise of human reason could distinguish the truth in scriptural texts and that by this means man could rise from the knowledge of things human to things divine. For Lefebre the exercise of reason was accompanied and conditioned by a mystical illumination of the spirit.[1]

This mystical component in Faber's interpretation may be traceable to his study of the Christian mystics, Eckhart and Tauler; even more significant was his intense religious experience, which in 1507 led him to consider a monastic career.[2] Whether the relation is causal or projective, the relation of that experience to certain subjective elements in Faber's hermeneutic merits examination. An example of that subjective element is thus stated by Oberman: "The unbeliever cannot discover the real meaning because he approaches the text without the most necessary exegetical tool of all, that selfsame spirit which created Scripture."[3] Because of his concern for piety, for the spiritual health of the monks, "he wants to present an antidote against a literal, 'objective', unconcerned reading of Holy Scripture."[4] A most vivid, historically fresh note is struck with his emphasis on encounter in the

---

[1]Myron P. Gilmore, The World of Humanism: 1453-1517; (Series: The Rise of Modern Europe, ed. William L. Langer, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 218.

[2]Gilmore, World of Humanism, 216.

[3]Oberman, Forerunners, 288.

[4]Oberman, Forerunners, 287.

Scripture, with the Scripture as acting upon the reader, rather than Scripture quiescent under man's scrutiny. This emphasis is highly reminiscent of an unforgettable personal, "tower" experience in his own history. We find these evidences, mentioned in footnotes in Oberman: "I want this edition to be of no other use to you, than that you everywhere encounter the one and only benefactor."[1] Again:

> And so I came to believe that there is a twofold literal sense. The one is the distorted sense of those who have no open eyes and interpret divine things according to the flesh and in human categories. /The footnote at this point is: 'The Latin text reads here passibiliter./ To read Scripture 'in human categories' means that the reader of the false literal sense makes Scripture the object (passive) of his reading, whereas the true sense is found when Scripture is the subject and the reader the object. The true reader of Scripture "does not act but is acted upon"; his own human insights give way to the influx of the Holy Spirit.[2]

Thus, the right understanding of Scripture is both "gift" and "grace."[3]

In the intensely personal, evangelical experience of Faber, the "benefactor" is quite precisely Jesus Christ. He is the Word, the Gospel:

> For the Word of Christ is the Word of God, the Gospel of peace, liberty, and joy, the Gospel of salvation, redemption, and life...If this Word is called the Gospel, the "good news," it is because, for us, it is the herald of all good things, and of the infinite blessings which are prepared for us in heaven. How

---

[1]Oberman, Forerunners, 307, n. 26. Cited from Faber's Introduction to Commentary on the Psalms.

[2]Oberman, Forerunners, 298-99 and the accompanying footnote, 305, n. 8.

[3]Oberman, Forerunners, 304.

> could those be Christians who do not love Christ and His Word with perfect purity?[1]

With striking simplicity in another place Faber maintains: "If you believe that Jesus Christ died for you, for the redemption of your sins, this is enough."[2] In keeping with this premise, Faber concluded that the monks for whom he was so concerned, languished and were not adequately fed spiritually because emphasis on the literal sense obscured the Christ, the "key to the understanding of David and about whom David spoke, commissioned by the Holy Spirit."[3] He remedies this lack by pointing to Christ in almost all the Psalms.

How comes this high-handed rejection of the literal sense, so strongly promulgated by Lyra, so typical of the humanist tradition in which Faber was himself a conspicuous member? Is this reactionary obscurantism, wilful capriciousness? Faber has a self-conscious hermeneutic, and he defends what he consciously does in his interpretation by declaring that there is a difference between a carnal literal sense and a spiritual literal sense. To ascribe this point of view to some lurking Neo-Platonism may seem unduly suspicious, but Gilmore

---

[1]James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin, eds., The Portable Renaissance Reader (New York: The Viking Press, 1953), pp. 84-85. Cited from Commentarii initiatorii in IV evangeliis praefatio (Meaux, 1522); trans. M. M. M.

[2]H. Daniel-Rops, The Protestant Reformation, trans. Audrey Butler (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1961), p. 370.

[3]Oberman, Forerunners, 299.

has, along with other researchers, pointed out Faber's knowledge of Platonism[1] and Rupp has alleged that, with other humanists, Faber "thought of the relation of text and meaning on the analogy of body-soul."[2] E. Thestrup Pedersen finds a neo-Platonic ontology in Faber's interpretation of Psalms.[3]

An absolute nexus is hardly provable, but the fact remains that for Faber the literal sense is eo ipso the spiritual sense[4] and that it coincides with that spiritual sense: "Et videor mihi alium videre sensum, qui scilicet est intentionis prophetae et spiritus sancti in eo loquentis, et hunc literalem appello, sed qui cum spiritu coincidit."[5] In distinction from the related double literal sense enunciated by Paul of Burgos, Faber holds for this single literal sense, which may have a two-fold appellation, either a prophetic literal sense or a New Testament literal sense, thinking here in particular of the Psalms as the prime object of application.[6] Allegorizing is rejected, not only because it is not treating with the literal, but because it does not consider the

---

[1]Gilmore, World of Humanism, 206.

[2]E. G. Rupp, "The Bible in the Age of the Reformation," 75-76.

[3]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 122.

[4]Ebeling, "Hermeneutik," 251.

[5]W. A. 4, 463, n. 2. The quotation is from the Introduction to Faber's Quincuplex.

[6]Oberman, Forerunners, 286-87.

intention of the divine Author of Scripture and the intention of the writer, i.e., the Spirit-led prophet.[1]

It is obvious that, in Faber's hermeneutic, we are touching on points very sensitive to the Reformation problems of interpretation. The very fact that we possess a copy of Faber's Quincuplex with Luther's holograph glosses from his earliest lectures on Psalms, indicates that the early Luther did not despise his understandings. Although a scanning of the Luther glosses will indicate Luther's freedom in criticism of Faber, the conclusions of Meissinger and Bainton are properly taken that Luther followed Faber in his mode of understanding the Psalms, and in his idea that the historical was the intention of the writer.[2]

In the exegetical movement of Faber and Luther we find another revealing parallel. In both there is a progression from a major interest in the Psalms to an interest in the Pauline epistles, particularly the letter to the Romans. In both there is a development from problems of exegesis, sources of helps and criticism of method to the substance of the message. The primary issue as to the great Biblical question is the nature of justification.[3] Gilmore concludes that already in the 1512

---

[1]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 305-306. Oberman, Forerunners, 298.

[2]Karl August Meissinger, Der katholische Luther (München: Leo Lehnen Verlag, 1952), 88-89; Roland H. Bainton, Studies on the Reformation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 7.

[3]Oberman, Forerunners, 288; Meissinger, Der Katholische Luther, 111.

edition of his commentary on the letters of Paul Faber has set forth the doctrine of justification by faith, anticipating the Reformers by several years in so doing.[1] John Woolman Brush, in his monograph on Faber, argues that the concept is not held in a fully Lutheran sense, since it is rather informed by a mystic concept of love.[2] In the context of a Lutheran Law-Gospel polarity E. Thestrup Pedersen notes that Faber improperly carries over the decalogue from the Old Testament to the New.[3] The simple fact that these two earnest seekers, under the Word, are led to such similar, if not identical conclusions, is noteworthy.

To some French Protestants the similarity in theological orientation of Luther and Faber has seemed sufficient to ascribe the initiation of the Reformation in Europe not to 1517, as traditionally has been done, but to 1512 through Faber. When Brush reports this he hastens to negate this possibility by ascribing to Faber not so much a new reforming as an old mystical tendency.[4] Even so, already in 1521 Erasmus made mention of the preaching of a certain Carmelite who

---

[1]Gilmore, World of Humanism, 217.

[2]John Woolman Brush, "Lefevre d'Etaples: Three Phases of His Life and Work," Reformation Studies: Essays in Honor of Roland H. Bainton, ed. Franklin H. Littell (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 125.

[3]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 236.

[4]Brush, "Lefevre d'Etaples," 124.

considered Faber one of the four Forerunners of the Antichrist.[1] With similar bias, a twentieth century Roman Catholic historian, H. Daniel-Rops assails the "wholly personal religion, in which the Church, as it were, had no part" as "evangelical humanism" which constituted a "real peril."[2] The fact that Faber renounced Luther and the developing Reformation to die in communion with Rome[3] does not remove the distrust of his method and his conclusions in interpreting Scripture and the doctrines of the church for the pious Roman Catholic.

From their vantage point Protestants also must recognize that the spiritual-edification mode of interpretation of Scripture was something quite different from the attempts at a more literal, historical interpretation as in Lyra, for example, and that the positing of a spiritual meaning in the letters as Faber conceived it did indeed have the dangerous possibility of opening the way to sheer subjectivism.[4] Ultimately, then, we judge Faber, too, to have set forth important new insights, without avoiding the old hazards.

---

[1]Oberman, Forerunners, 31. The reference is from a letter of Erasmus, March 13, 1521, to Alexander Schweiss.

[2]Daniel-Rops, The Protestant Reformation, 370.

[3]Gilmore, World of Humanism, 219.

[4]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 306.

## Review and Summary

Before we proceed to the major exposition of our thesis, we must attempt to review and summarize this historical section. The chronological statement must be transposed into a scheme with sufficient inner logic to provide a form for analyzing the development of the hermeneutic problem up to the Reformation, and to give a workable structure to the description and analysis of the hermeneutics of Luther and Melanchthon. Such a scheme should also clarify and sharpen the central problems of this inquiry, and delimit the data subsequently to be adduced. The scheme is intended as a convenient structure only, and is not to be construed as all-encompassing nor as omnicompetent to contain the varied elements touched on in the history or incorporated in the primary statement of this dissertation.

In view of our selected historical presentation and in view of anticipated developments in the Reformation era, we shall set forth three categories: the Scholastic, the Humanist, and the Mystical. Under each category we must define the movements thus, again rather arbitrarily, denominated, state the major affirmations relevant to this inquiry, the assumptions on which such affirmations are based, and the application to hermeneutical principles. Inasmuch as there is evident a growth and development in the history of interpretation, our three categories will not have been stressed with equal force throughout that development. Conceding these limitations, let us now proceed

to draw out such a summary and conclusions.

Under the Scholastics we subsumed what might well also be called the ecclesiastical perspective. It is the dominant, almost uniform pre-Reformation outlook in the Church of the West. The growing respect for tradition has been undergirded by the systematizing of the Scholastics as a recognizable theological group. In the Alexandrian tradition, which devolved mainly on Origen, the stress continued through certain emphases in Augustine, although he incorporated elements foreign to this perspective as well. Gabriel Biel represented in our sketch the figure typical of the group closest temporally to the Reformation.

The Scholastics affirmed the primacy of canonical Scripture in matters of doctrine, but accepted tradition which gave increasing clarity to the teachings. In some quarters there was a willingness to concede tradition parallel authority with the written Scripture. This authoritative source, Scripture and tradition, was considered to be capable of yielding propositional truths.

Those who under the guidance of the Holy Spirit set forth these Scriptures were not necessarily, themselves, aware of the full implication of their words as to their intrinsic historical meaning or their prophetic significance. Likewise, the interpreters of the record might operate in either of two levels, a lower, naive level of the simple meanings, or a higher, esoteric level to be achieved by a spiritual or intellectual elite.

The assumptions of the Scholastics were colored by a tendency to prefer abstractions. God is primarily Being, and Jesus Christ is to be seen as the mirroring of Being in his being. The interest, Christologically, is more centered on what Christ is than on what He does. There is a preoccupation with the metaphysical problems, and a quite specific judgment that philosophy is at the very least a necessary handmaid to the theolgical enterprise. The ontological presuppositions predispose to an acceptance of some form of Platonism. From this assumption stems the view of man as body and soul, with soul of a much higher nature than body, and the spiritual functions hierarchically above the sense functions of the body. The telos of God's plan for man, therefore, is necessarily a spiritual, future realization of the Ideal. In such a perspective history is denigrated, whether as past, present or future time, in favor of the exaltation of a trans-historical fulfilment of divine purpose.

The hermeneutical implications or applications of such affirmations and assumptions are clear enough. Once the concession has been made metaphysically of a world which mirrors the Idea, there can be no Sola Scriptura, not even a Scripture cum tradition, for the world itself may reflect the heavenly. Note here the ease of accepting also Aristotelian categories of analysis of empirical data toward theological ends. The esoteric character of these understandings rules out the propriety of reading and interpreting the Scripture by the masses of the common believers. Only those duly gifted may penetrate such

mysteries, and even here the developing concept of the nature of the Church as shadowing forth the heavenly Church, the True Bride of Christ, makes it imperative to acknowledge the prior right and obligation of the Church to rule on interpretation. The justification is typically circular, since the means of undergirding the juridical power of prelates depends on the same presuppositions, i.e., since the church on earth is the reflection of the Church in Heaven, the authority of the Church in Heaven is operative in the church on earth. As stultifying as this came to be in late medieval times, the principle was nevertheless generally entrenched that Scripture had been interpreted by the commonly accepted Fathers of the Church, and that new questions were to be resolved by the contemporary Fathers in the person of Pope or Council, as their views were codified by the canonists.

Such a magnificent edifice of ecclesiastical authority demanded one response from the individual man: humility. In great and small affairs he was to subjugate himself to Mother Church, in whom was Wisdom and Knowledge. And humility meant, further, unquestioning obedience, not least of the mind. It is self-evident that under such limitations, the study of Scripture would be secondary to systematic studies of the given authority, and would have difficulty in making its way independent of intrusions from the sovereign systematic discipline.

Our humanist sub-division in its full-blown form in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is directly traceable to and dependent on the Renaissance rediscovery of the classical emphasis on man, his high

potentials in intellect and esthetic sensistivity and his central role in the universe. From such an ancestry there derives a certain tendency toward rationalism, at the very least a high expectation of the power of intellection, and an optimistic confidence in the capacity of learning to improve morals and human institutions. As we shall apply more specifically later, humanists looked realistically at the world about them.

Thus, the confidence in reason which is evident in scholasticism is further developed in humanism, and the tendency to open a cleavage between the individual thinker and the corporate body of the Church is noteworthy. We have stylized the scholastics as churchmen, in the sense of their hierarchical position, or their commitment to the tradition. We see the humanists typically among the doctores, the scholars who have a commitment to learning as such, and sense the pressures of the Church for conformity variously, sometimes as vexatious, at other times as intolerable. This development is a corollary of the growing, and self-conscious, awareness of the universities as powerful, independent faculties, creating new understandings rather than simply perpetuating and transmitting the old. The sharp satire of the Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum is an evidence of the controversy between doctors and the whole clergy, and the fearlessness of the words, in spite of the anonymity of the authors, is testimony to the depth of the underlying feelings.

We see the humanists accepting the history of man as real, and

this world, therefore as real. Hebraic thinking in its Biblical sense and the work of the Antiochenes is then in line with this perspective. Certain elements in Augustine, which we may associate with his early training in Latin rhetoric, are of the same stripe. Nicholas of Lyra and Faber Stapulensis, as we have developed briefly above, are our prime exemplars of the humanist outlook.

To the humanist scholar, the Scripture is a meaningful record, a document to be studied qua record. This means that the writers of the record assume larger dimensions. It is important to know who wrote, and when and why. Thus also, the new sensitivity to chronology operates, and anchronisms are no longer accepted naively. The day of the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals is past, and the day of seeking for the correct number of Isaiahs has dawned. To search out such writings in their historical settings requires the specialists, the doctores. These are men who have competences in language, literature, history and archaeology. They have learned wherever there was worthy material for study, from the pagan classics and the decretals, from Jew, Greek, Latin, barbarian. Without being precisely aware of the distinction, these men have followed the way toward "objective" consideration of the facts, the detached research of the specialist-scholar.

The theological assumptions of the Christian humanists strike us as dangerously tending toward that crypto-universalism which Wilburn ascribes to Erasmus and the desert reaches of the later

Enlightenment.[1] The dichotomy of rationalist scholar and obsequious member of the contemporary Church, unfortunately, is a phenomenon not entirely unknown even in our own day. It may not be provable that the contacts with pagan learning corrupted good Christian men with anthropomorphic concepts of deity, but the growing sense that if God might not be as transcendent as the remote God of the scholastics, He must at least be higher than the noblest men, operates to evoke questions as to the kind of love God must display, the kind of tolerance, the kind of punishments conformable to His goodness. Such an exemplar of humanism as Erasmus, for example, could not conceive that his God could accept or condone the kind of internecine strife which that ruffian Luther was engendering in his protestations. Moderation was the preferable modus vivendi.

Although a good part of the program of humanism was the editing and publication of the classic works of philosophy, it seems defensible to ascribe their insights and contributions rather to the literary qualities and contents of the past than the metaphysical. The exposure to the manifold wealth of the literature of the past could only work to heighten sensitivities as to the various forms of literature and their proper interpretation, chronicle as chronicle, poetry as metaphor, legend and fable as instructive but not of necessity chronicle, and so on. One of the sharp, incidental satires of the Epistolae breathes

---

[1]Ralph G. Wilburn, Historical Shape, 43.

scorn on the pseudo-learned who would interpret also the Poets in the revered four-fold mode of the scholastics.[1]

That ancient sense of the function of drama as evocative of proper emotions in the lives of the spectators may be seen in the belief of the humanists in the pedagogical worth and effectiveness of the Scripture. As we have suggested above, this optimistic view informs their philosophies of education and their expectations of reform in the Church. There is, therefore, hope for man, by the working of man, in the sphere of man, i.e., in this world, in the secular. The humanist of this age is too close to his contemporary culture to be able to shed completely his apocalyptic and eschatological hopes, but he is also too learned to allow an unexamined other-worldliness to draw him away from the new Golden Age which is dawning for man. The reduction in the force of the old views of the end of history does conspire to revive the ancient cyclical views of history, and with our historical hindsight we might conjecture that a relativizing of history is involved when the telos is minimized. When relativism in turn is given the rein, the particularities of history become offensive, including the Incarnation and the atoning work, but this outcome could hardly be perceived by the humanists in the midst of the exciting new thought-world.

We have already intimated many of the extensions of humanistic

---

[1]Francis Griffin Stokes, ed., Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum: The Latin Text with An English Rendering (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), p. 73.

development into the realm of hermeneutical principle. The basic viewpoint must result in a greater emphasis on method, on technique, on the application of human, learned skills to the interpretation. The letter of the Scripture is important, not atomistically, but as the medium of human communication. The interpreter, whose understanding and skills are the operative forces, is not conceived as subjectively involved in the exposition, rather, he is as we have pointed out, "objective," and may be Jew or Christian, or Arab. Since the Scripture is conceived of as edifying, and all men are to be edified, the work of the interpreter should be capable of being understood by all. The art of letters should be given to the rude cow-herd, so that he may be illuminated by the Word of God. This prescription requires not only translations into the vernacular, but simple interpretations to meet the minds of the simple. This can be accomplished.

The mystic or spiritual strain is discernible throughout the history of Biblical interpretation as a passim factor, lacking a corporate or institutional character, nearly always an affair of the private individual. It is considered compatible with the scholasticism of St. Thomas or Bernard of Clairvaux, it exists in the extreme asceticism of the monastic community and in the quiet, pious life of simple peasant believers. It is characterized not only by individualism, but by inwardness, so that its piety must always be reckoned as a matter of deep, personal conviction, even though the forms of expression may be the same as the forms others make external and nominal. In his use

of the Bible, too, the mystic is able to transform the regnant methods by his own urgent quest for the divine word, so that he might well use allegory as well as literalism to his purpose. For this reason, in part, we have not treated specifically of a mystic type of interpreter in our historical overview. The writings of Eckhart and Tauler might be examined from this perspective, but would yield little not touched on in other types of interpretation.

It is in the sixteenth century that we see the greatest growth of that aspect of the mystic life which concerns us. The encounter of the Reformers with the so-called "left-wing" of the Reformation, or in Luther's rather opprobrious term, the "Schwärmer," posed fresh hermeneutical questions which required confrontation. The fact that these "spirituals" could adduce the evidence of the great mystics and of the Brethren of the Common Life in their own day, makes the issues even more inescapable.

It would be incorrect to say that the spirituals ignored or disdained the Scripture; it would be equally incorrect to say that they were concerned about the whole Scripture. That is to say that typically they were nourished on those parts of Holy Writ which sustained and enlarged their unique position. While it seems ironic, it must be asked whether the books about the Scripture, intended to encourage the spiritual life, did not in fact supplant the Scripture itself to many of these pious ones. But the absolute principle was maintained, the Scripture was the Word of God, given through godly men by the Holy

Spirit of God. How this was accomplished was not a valid question in their minds, nor was there questioning of the necessity of that same Spirit to comprehend the record.

The assumptions underlying such a position, especially when considered in the exaggerated terms we have employed, must be reviewed. The distinction between spiritual and material, between the spirit and the body, is always sharply etched. Thus the metaphysical presupposition most congenial to the outlook, whether overt or covert, is Neo-Platonic. God is Spirit, transcendent, ultimate, yet He is Personal Spirit, opening the prospect of communion with Himself to the receptive spirit of man. It is only the higher, spiritual nature in man which can respond to this divine invitation, hence the inevitable tendency toward ascetic withdrawal. It is this tendency, in turn, which is anti-this-world, and anti-history. The eschatological hope leans toward the apocalyptic type, interpreted as the destruction of the evil material, the historical eon, and the emergence of the fulfilment in the new life of the spirit, in full communion with God, untrammelled by the material and fleshly.

We must concede that where the mystical did not turn aside to sheer pantheistic absorption into the great Divine, it represented a noble, personal religion of great integrity and strength. In spite of what we have said above about the temptation to supplant Scripture with commentary on Scripture, it must be recognized further that the character of the Word as personal address is maintained here as nowhere

else in the tradition. And the saving Christ who is thus encountered, although tending to be more spiritual than his birth, his hunger, and his bloody death will really permit, saves this line also from the flat rejection of history and the historical account.

As we conclude this schematic summary it must again be pointed out how artificial and stylized, of necessity, this has been. No naked, "pure" example of any one of the three emphases could conceivably be found, for there is a constant, unconscious commingling. The question our thesis poses is whether or not Luther and Melanchthon tend to perpetuate any one of these given lines of approach, whether there is some new combination of principles and methods, and, if some subjective element is discernible in relation to the old lines or to some new synthesis.

Perhaps it is superfluous to add not as a nice, pious statement, but as a conclusion based on the evidence, that the overwhelming conviction grows through such a historical analysis that the Lord has not allowed His Word to return to Him void, that He has not forgotten His promise to be with His people to the end of the age. As D. E. Nineham has effectively put it:

> The human exposition of the revelation is always compounded not only of the revelation itself but also of ideas and presuppositions already in the recipient's mind quite apart from his acceptance of the revelation he is seeking to expound. These ideas and presuppositions were sometimes such that when they came together with the revelation the result was mutual

> illumination; but also...they were sometimes of such a character as to obscure or distort the divine demand.[1]

The dynamic character of the continuing struggle of the faithful God to communicate with faithless men is indicated in words of L. Hodgson, cited by Nineham:

> "The real object of our study is not what the men whose works we are reading were consciously aware of thinking and saying; it is the truth which was struggling to make itself known through mind conditioned by their presuppositions."[2]

The perpetuation of the Christian Church in the world through the turmoil of the centuries attests that God did make Himself heard and understood by His own.

[1] D. E. Nineham, "The Lessons of the Past for the Present," The Church's Use of the Bible, ed. D. E. Nineham, 164.

[2] Nineham, "The Lessons of the Past for the Present," 164-65. The quotation is from L. Hodgson, For Faith and Freedom, p. 114. Italics are Nineham's.

# CHAPTER III

# THE HERMENEUTICS OF LUTHER: PROGRESS AND POLEMICS

## Personal History

It is evident from the preceding chapter that the history of hermeneutics has a wide context in the history of the church, both institutional and personal. As we have seen in the instance of Augustine personal religious development may be of much more than private significance. In the same way, the Lutheran Reformation until the death of Luther in 1546 closely paralleled the spiritual progress of Martin Luther. This quite obviously does not mean that Luther caused all that stir so he could break out of the monastic bonds and assume the marital bonds. It does mean that Luther's discovery of the Gospel and the meaning he saw in that Gospel is of the essence of Reformation research.

### Priest, Professor, Preacher

We must not overlook the importance of Luther's callings as priest, professor and preacher. The responsibilities laid on him by these demands, the expectations of his superiors, his parishioners and his students, when combined with the new insights of the Gospel, evoked massive, rigorous response in Biblical studies which we are

here examining.

As a part of his preparation for the office of the priesthood Luther studied Gabriel Biel's Canon of the Mass. We do not dare to assume from this fact that he learned to know all of the hermeneutical principles which we have ascribed to Biel earlier in this work. We do assume that Luther, as a faithful son of the Church, and a devout monk, accepted the authority of the Church over against the Scripture. Beyond this, Biel's sense of the overwhelming presence of the Divine Majesty and the awesome responsibility of the priest must have played in to the well-known incident of Luther's difficulty in saying his first Mass. Luther modified, but did not lose, that sense of the Holy God.

These studies of the Mass which were obviously more theological than simple rubric-listings for the Mass renewed Luther's familiarity with the great Nominalist theologian whom he had encountered earlier when he was an undergraduate student at Erfurt. Biel would continue to sharpen Luther's understanding when he continued as a theological student and lecturer at the Universities of Erfurt and Wittenberg. The general state of later medieval scholarship today, and the limitation of this present research do not permit a detailed correlation of Biel's viewpoints and Luther's, but the recurring mention of Biel in the Luther corpus indicates that his teaching had to be reckoned with. We add only that Luther had a deep respect for Biel, but not for all those who assumed they were proper disciples of the Nominalist.

Johann von Staupitz, Luther's superior, invoked the demands of

monastic obedience in winning Luther over to his plans for the young monk. Staupitz was convinced of Luther's aptitude for the academic life and arranged that he pursue the course of studies toward the Doctorate in Theology which would qualify him to succeed the Vicar-General as Professor of Biblical Theology at the young university in Wittenberg. Luther's reluctance may have been due to his sense that the work posed too great a drain on his physical resources; perhaps the rather formidable financial outlay seemed a bad gamble for a life that Luther was convinced would be very short.

Study, especially Biblical exegesis, was most congenial to Luther. He learned in his year of teaching Moral Philosophy at Wittenberg (1508-1509) that he had little taste for Aristotle and philosophy per se. But the prescribed work for the doctorate comprehended indirectly as well as directly a solid Biblical base. The study of Peter Lombard's Sentences, the systematic portion of the curriculum, confronted him with a body of material both Biblical and patristic. Staupitz's fine guiding hand must have encouraged Luther to follow his own Augustinian leanings, and Luther responded by enthusiastic study and notation of the great Bishop's Opuscula.

The exegetical studies introduced Luther to the standard materials: the Glossa Ordinaria, the Glossa Interlinearis, the Postilla of Nicholas of Lyra and the Annotationes of Paul of Burgos. As early as the summer of 1509 Luther began teaching Biblical courses; he began both his study of Hebrew and Greek before he received the Doctor's degree in October,

1512, after five years of preparation.

With a solid, tenured position assured to him at the relatively young academic age of twenty-eight, Luther might have droned quietly on perfunctorily transmitting the accumulated wisdom of his teachers and his accepted texts. Scholars continue to deduce precise relationships in words and thoughts by comparing Luther's exegetical notes with the Glosses and Scholia and all the rest. However, such verifiable relationships do not tell the whole story. Luther demonstrated an irrepressible originality, freshness and critical acumen in his earliest work as a teacher. The extant notes on Lombard's Sentences and his early critical judgment that two works regarded as Augustine's must be considered spurious on internal evidence confirm this generalization. As he developed his mastery of the theological inheritance of his day he continually reshaped the traditional vocabulary and structure by redefining terms and by incorporating them in the total context of his theology.

It is important to note that Luther was cast in a dual role at Wittenberg, that he became court preacher by virtue of his professorship. The point is not that he would, in a sense, have to preach his way out of his own spiritual problems. That would be a sorry indictment of Staupitz and the Elector, and a sad commentary on the shape of preaching at any moment in history. But Luther was not privileged to sit in a solitary cell and fret over his ultimate salvation alone. The congregation before him waited for the Word of God. They were his

burden. In his sense of his vocation to preach the gospel to these people he would continually be led farther down the road to reformation.

We conclude that Luther's preparation for these three callings, and his carrying out of the prescribed duties of the same contributed to his Biblical understanding. He received substantial information and subjective challenge in each of them. We judge further that the Turmerlebnis to which we now turn was decisive in effecting a major change in his theological and hermeneutical outlook.

## Discovery of the Gospel

For Luther, the distinctive element in that "moment before God" which has been termed the Turmerlebnis, was his discovery of the gospel. The dating of this moment is vital to the precise understanding of Luther's early exegetical works, but in the context of our inquiry we must accept simply the established fact which so substantially altered Luther's theology and his hermeneutics.[1]

The discovery was given at the conjunction point of two quests of the monk-professor. On the one hand he sought assured grace for a passionately uneasy conscience, on the other hand he struggled for

---

[1]Donald C. Ziemke, a young American Luther scholar, gives a concise review of the development of Luther's early exegesis, and the question of the date and significance of the Turmerlebnis, in his small volume, Love for the Neighbor in Luther's Theology (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), especially Ch. 2, "Luther's Early Biblical Lectures," pp. 14-42.

clarity in the interpretation of vexing Biblical themes. Over thirty years later, in 1545, Luther recalled the transformation in these vivid words:

> I raged in this way with a fierce and disturbed conscience, and yet I knocked importunately at Paul in this place, thirsting most ardently to know what St. Paul meant.
>
> At last, God being merciful, as I meditated day and night on the connection of the words, namely, 'the Justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written, "the Just shall live by Faith," ' there I began to understand the Justice of God as that by which the just lives by the gift of God, namely by faith, and this sentence, 'the Justice of God is revealed in the Gospel,' to be that passive justice, with which the merciful God justifies us, by faith, as it is written, 'the just lives by Faith.'
>
> This straightway made me feel as though reborn, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself. From then on, the whole face of scripture appeared different. I ran through the scriptures then, as memory served, and found the same analogy in other words, as the Work of God (opus) that which God works in us, Power of God (virtus Dei) with which he makes us strong, wisdom of God (sapientia Dei) with which he makes us wise, fortitude of God, salvation of God, glory of God.[1]

Can such a testimonial be admitted as significant in the career of a great theologian? A time-honored Roman Catholic criticism makes it out as an inadvertent admission that the professor had not done his homework, that he had not learned from his predecessors that there was already a consensus of interpretation in the Church on this matter of righteousness, incorporating ideas of grace, of faith, of the unmerited character of the working. What these criticisms overlook is

---

[1]The whole passage is from W. A. 54, 179-187. The translation above is found in Rupp, The Righteousness of God, 122.

Luther's counter-critique that the context of these terms was infused grace and a gradual healing or becoming righteous. Those who treasure the "conversion" aspect of this realization must deal with their private specter of a theologian who has too much of sentiment and too little of understanding to share. Without discrediting other components in a truly unique human experience we find merit in the gently rueful, but profoundly suggestive statement of Professor Rupp that "it is perhaps the way in which in His inscrutable wisdom He addresses His theological professors!"[1] What experienced student does not know the rare, uninvited moment when the "pieces have fallen together," when the essential error and its potential resolution have arrived with blinding insight? Luther's memory recalls sharply the operative words in their new shape--that "the just live" now, immediately, here, that God "justifies us" sinners, actively, totally, graciously in Christ. These words open Paradise, not the dreary vistas of earthly becoming or of purgatory.

## Coram Deo: Luther and Paul

Because Luther's spiritual problems were so central in his personal and professional development, it is imperative that we make clear what their nature was. A number of contemporary students have

---

[1] Gordon Rupp, Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 39.

judged Luther psychotic and his experiences have been designated by all the current psychological jargon. Among these psychoanalysts of the Weimarer Ausgabe are the psychologist Erik H. Erikson,[1] the playwright John Osborne,[2] and the literary critic and man-of-all work Norman O. Brown.[3] Psychoanalytic conclusions can hardly be validly drawn over four hundred years after the death of the patient, nor can they be adduced from materials intended not primarily for a personal viewpoint but for theological, hortatory and educational purposes. These alleged analyses, like the bitterly vitriolic denominational allegations which preceded them, overlook a very essential point. That point is the positive application Luther made throughout the entire remainder of his life of the profound insights he gained as a young monk.

Luther gave the most objective, sober and studious attention to the implications of his shattering discovery of the meaning of the Gospel. The central conviction, that he had been and continued to be encountered by the Living God in the Scripture remained with him throughout all contrary suggestions that it might well even have been the devil who had urged him on the course of the religious life. Like

---

[1]Erik H. Erikson, Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History (London: Faber and Faber, 1958).

[2]John Osborne, Luther: A Play (New York: Signet Books, 1963).

[3]Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959).

many a fanatic, Luther may have been zealously defending sheer illusion, but the effectiveness of his insight in opening new vistas of understanding reduces such a possibility also to absurdity.

By subsuming the central material of his provocative Luther study, "The Righteousness of God" under the heading, Coram Deo, Professor Rupp rightly stresses the conviction which emerged and established itself for Luther, that man stands before a God who is not to be enmeshed in the web of man's thoughts, but is free, active, dynamic. As we shall see, this had perhaps the most revolutionary influence on Reformation theology and on its hermeneutics. Let us consider some of the more general aspects of this change first.

Since Coram Deo every man stands condemned as sinner, sinner man must expect the Word to condemn and terrorize him. "The only effect of the law, when correctly understood, is to make us guilty and to condemn us to everlasting hell under the wrath of God."[1] Only thus does the needful gift of the Holy Spirit come to him: "The Holy Spirit is given to none except to those who are in sorrow and fear; in them it produces good fruit."[2] This view of the force of God's Law appears to be a generalizing force. What it does, however, is to eliminate the atomizing of law by viewing God as the Righteous One standing over against man, rather than as the judge of individual laws,

---

[1]Luther, Lenker XII, 431. Sermon on John 3:1-15.

[2]Luther, Lenker XII, 281. Sermon on John 14:23-31.

bound to his own legal code. So far as salvation is concerned the problem, by virtue of the confrontation, is removed from the arena of the acquisition of legal merits by good works to the problem of becoming righteous. As Erich Seeberg has said, "Was Luther erfahren hat, war die Unmöglichkeit des Gesetzes. Die Auffassung des Gesetzes verbindet ihn mit Paulus und trennt ihn zugleich von ihm."[1]

Thus the great apostle makes his impressive entrance and takes the center of the stage as Luther's prime mentor and spiritual example. All the essential Luther themes are Pauline: the experience of confrontation, the rightousness of God, the condemnation, the new righteousness by faith. Note how Ragnar Bring incorporates them all in this pregnant paragraph:

> We might say that St. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus gave him the key to the Scriptures. He had followed the Rabbinical tradition and had learned a great deal from it. But he discovered that at this most decisive point of all it was wrong and therefore did not represent the true tradition. For the Rabbis did not understand God's righteousness (Rom. 10.2). But this did not mean that St. Paul wanted to propagate a new doctrine of his own concerning righteousness. Rather did he think that he had been given the true understanding of the Scriptures, i.e., of the Old Testament,...According to him, the Old Testament did not teach that righteousness was of the Law, but of faith.
>
> ...The Law...was given in order to judge and condemn them.[2]

---

[1]Erich Seeberg, Luthers Theologie in Ihren Grundzügen (II Aufl., Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1950), p. 16.

[2]Ragnar Bring, "Preaching the Law," Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. XIII (March, 1960), 2.

## Theological and Hermeneutical Insights

If our assumption is correct that Luther followed Paul in experience and in thinking, we may expect a broad range of new insights to flow from this beginning. What, then, do we find in Luther developing out of his great moment?

Luther understood the Turmerlebnis basically as his apprehension of the unmerited grace of God in Christ, effected by the contingent activity of God, and communicated through a living Word from God. This summary implies a Christocentric emphasis, a doctrine of a Viva Vox Scripture and a concept of God that is dynamic rather than static.

### Christocentric Emphasis

A random sampling of citations indicates clearly the force of the Christocentric emphasis. The flat designation, Christ, comprehends the whole issue: "Tolle Christum e scripturis, quid amplius in illis invenies?"[1] "Man kan sonst nicht predigen quam de Iesu Christo et fide. Das ist generalis scopus."[2] The whole Scripture is for the knowledge of Christ: "Omnia scripturae verba tendunt, ut Christus cognoscatur."[3] More specifically, the reference is to the cross:

---

[1]W. A. 18, 606.

[2]W. A. 36, 180.

[3]W. A. 14, 197. Cf. Luther, Lenker X, 150.

"Crux enim Christi ubique in Scripturis occurrit."[1] Tota scriptura nihil docet nisi Crucem."[2] "Ego non intelligo usquam in Scripturis nisi Christum crucifixum."[3] Luther cited Paul's words in I Corinthians 2 and commented "Sihe, ist das der hohe Apostel, der so treffliche erleuchtung gehabt, und weis nichts herrlichers und köstlichers zurhümen wider die falschen Apostel noch höhers zu predigen denn den armen gecreuzigten Gott?"[4]

The purpose of the cross is the salvation of man: "Eo tendit tota scriptura, ut doceat: quicunque crediderit salvabitur."[5] And again, "Video scripturam in omnibus et per omnia consonare et consentire sic, ut de tantae rei veritate /redemption/ et certitudine nihil dubitari possit."[6] If a man knows this article of the faith he may ignore some of the vexing problems of interpretation. Thus, Luther judged in the matter of a harmonizing of the synoptic gospels:

> These are problems and will remain problems. I shall not venture to settle them. Nor are they essential. It is only that there are so many sharp and shrewd people who are fond of bringing up all sorts of subtle questions and demanding definite and precise answers. But if we

---

[1]W. A. 36, 3.

[2]W. A. 9, 560.

[3]W. A. 4, 153.

[4]W. A. 28, 136.

[5]W. A. 9, 383.

[6]W. A. 40/3, 652.

> understand Scripture properly and have the genuine articles of our faith--that Jesus Christ, God's Son, suffered and died for us--then our inability to answer all such questions will be of little consequence. The evangelists do not all observe the same chronological order. The one may place an event at an earlier, the other at a later time.[1]

Christ and His work are the material of the Scripture; Christ in His person is the interpreter of the Scripture. Luther emphasized this in a variety of ways and with a variety of purposes, frequently polemical.

> Therefore it behooves us to learn to identify the Bridegroom's voice. If someone should come without Christ, against Christ, or under the name of Christ, tell him: "The name of the Bridegroom and of the bride dare not be blasphemed and dishonored. Christ says so and so. And whoever follows the voice of the Bridegroom will not alter or change this message." In the home it would be intolerable if the wife were to act contrary to the husband's commands...The church has no right either to hear Christ the Bridegroom speak or command, and then to change His orders...Therefore we must be on the alert against the devil, who assails us either with doctrine that runs counter to Christ, as the tyrants do, or with doctrine that is devoid of Christ, as the canon laws do. And others will come with the Scriptures and give themselves the semblance of the Lord Christ; this, of course, is also against Christ.[2]

Since Christ alone teaches these things[3] one must sit at His feet as Mary did and as Luther had learned to do:

> Hoc est l., quod mus gesondert sein, qui vult loqui et audire, discere oportet einsam sey cum Christo. Sic mihi factum. Meam doctrinam et praedicationem

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed., XXII, 218.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed. XXII, 446.

[3]Luther, Lenker XII, 331.

> non potui assequi in omnibus libris, in Aristotele, apud Scholasticos, Thomam, Scotum, donec wurde abgesondert a turba et ipsum solum audivi. Cum hoc facerem et illum tantum audirem und setzt mich mit Maria ad pedes, tum didici, quid Christus et doctus fidem. Das ist uns von noten, quia nos Christiani habemus ein scheren und ebenteuerlichen glauben.[1]

Even the secrets of the Scripture are opened by Him:

> Haec diligenter inculcanda et credenda sunt, cum "aperitur scriptura," alias enim nemo cogitet unquam, quod possit intrare in penetralia et secreta scripturae excluso illo Brachio Domini, incarnato Deo.[2]

These principles may be applied in the controversies of the day as with Carlstadt: "It will be hard for Carlstadt to give up his views, but Christ will force him to do so if he does not yield of his own accord."[3] As over against the Jews, it is having Jesus Christ that gives Christians understanding also of the Old Testament:

> Wir Christen haben den synn und verstand der Biblia, weil wir das Newe Testament, das ist Jhesum Christum haben, welcher im alten Testament verheissen und hernach komen, mit sich das liecht und verstand der schrifft bracht hat, wie er spricht Joh. 5.[4]

The foregoing statements leave room for debate as to whether we should speak of Christocentric or Christological concern. A rigid

---

[1]W. A. 34, II, 148, 6-13.

[2]W. A. 40, III, 702, 23.

[3]Luther, Correspondence, II, 102. No. 533 Luther to Spalatin (Wittenberg), March 13, 1522.

[4]W. A. 54, 29.

interpretation one way or the other would involve both possibility and hazard. If we do not demand a sharp either-or we find almost unlimited possibilities for combination and exploitation of the emphases. We shall look briefly at some evidence in the work of Ebeling and other Luther scholars.

Ebeling speaks of Christ as the content which gives understanding:

> Christus ist nicht nur der Inhalt der Schrift, sondern auch der sich allein selbst erschliessende, allein selbst das Verstehen gebende Inhalt der Schrift. Dieser Zusammenhang ist für Luther wichtiger als der Hinweis auf die "Konformität der Affekte" als subjektive Voraussetzung der Exegese, eine in Bereich der Mystik durchaus traditionelle Forderung.[1]

Ebeling notes further on the christological side: "Aber die eigentliche Rolle der christologischen Formel in der Evangelienauslegung ist nicht ihre Begründung durch einzelne Schriftstellen, sondern ihr Dienst als kritischer Kanon für die Auslegung."[2] He goes on to point up Luther's concern with the distinction of the two natures in the one person. Given the theological presuppositions of incarnation, sacrament, faith and confession, Ebeling can proceed to summarize Luther's gospel interpretation in four different ways /Weise/: historical, sacramental, exemplary /exemplarisch/, and spiritual.

John M. Headley stresses Christ as the scope of Scripture for

---

[1] Ebeling, Evang. Ev., 283. Cf. Luther, Lenker X, 149.

[2] Ebeling, Evang. Ev., 243.

Luther, and the Christocentric interpretation which was the pattern, and applies this principle to Luther's use of allegory, the tropological (derived from a spiritual-literal sense), and a typological method derived from this scope.[1] According to A. Skevington Wood, "Luther's Christocentric approach to Scripture supplies the clue to the paradox involved in his insistence on the primacy of the literal sense whilst conceding that there is a further, inner, spiritual meaning."[2]

The lack of uniform and simple conclusions in the judgments quoted above indicates that we must add other elements to the Christic if we are to state the meaning of the evangelical insight into Scripture and the unique subjective element in the Lutheran reformers.

## The Living Word Addresses Man

Once we accept the premise that Luther viewed the proper Christian faith as relating to the gracious activity of God in Christ we open the way to viewing the Scripture not as a prescription for what man must do, nor a simple record of what God has once done. The Scripture becomes the living Word, the continuing act of God. Man is addressed in the Word.

It would be easy at this point to fall prey to the temptation to

---

[1]Headley, Luther's View, 21, 22, 140.

[2]A. Skevington Wood, Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation (London: The Tyndale Press, 1960), p. 34.

modernize Luther and anachronistically to employ the concepts and vocabulary of twentieth century theologies strongly influenced by the development of existentialist categories. There should be no doubt that there are strong family relationships between Luther and Christian existentialist understandings, which we shall have occasion to exploit in the course of this study. However, respect for the realities of history demands caution in dealing with what was only vaguely adumbrated in the sixteenth century. How, then, can we clarify the concept of "living Word" in terms proper to the Reformation era?

Although he was a twentieth century man, Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated the polarities with typical acuity:

> What is the real evil in this question? It is not that it is asked at all. It is that the false answer is contained within it, that within it is attacked the basic attitude of the creature towards the Creator. Man is expected to be judge of God's word instead of simply hearing and doing it. This is accomplished as follows. On the basis of an idea, a principle, some previously gained knowledge about God, man is now to judge God's concrete Word. When man proceeds against the concrete Word of God with the weapon of a principle, with an idea of God, he is in the right from the first, he becomes God's master, he has left the path of obedience, he has withdrawn from God's addressing him. In other words, in this question the possibility is played off against the reality and the possibility undermines the reality. However, in man's relationship to God there are no possibilities, there is only reality. There is no '...allow me...,' there is only command and obedience.[1]

---

[1]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3 (London: SCM Press, 1959), p. 68.

Thus the living Word of God is seen as inviting and demanding not a critical judgment, but a listening response.

In a scholarly study which betrays a near-obsession with his theme H. Østergaard-Nielsen has scrutinized the problem of the living word in Luther. Here, for example, he comments on the personal character of the relationship to the Law:

> Nur wenn man das Gottesverhältnis als ein persönliches Verhältnis auffasst, gilt, dass die göttlichen Befehle wirkliches Imperative sind, die als solche nur sagen, was geschehen soll, und nicht, was mit Notwendigkeit geschehen muss; denn nur in der personalen Beziehung gilt, dass der Mensch sein Dasein--nicht in der Übereinstimmung mit einer Norm hat, sondern in einer Gemeinschaft, in der Glaube und Liebe walten.[1]

In a similar vein elsewhere[2] Østergaard-Nielsen declares that the law is made an idol if the God-relation is objectivized. Adolf Sperl also brings the elements under consideration together in a perceptive statement:

> Dieses verdammende Wort Gottes angesichts dessen "nur noch Sterben blieb," konnte nur durch Gott selbst überwunden werden...Nur durch Gott selbst, durch sein Wort konnte bestätigt werden, dass das Verdammungswort nicht Gottes letztes Wort ist...Darum hat er mit solch äusserster Kraft um das Verständnis der Schrift und den in diesem Zusammenhang zentralen Begriffes der "iustitia dei" gerungen. Und deswegen

---

[1]H. Østergaard-Nielsen, Scriptura Sacra et Viva Vox: Eine Lutherstudie (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1957), pp. 86-87.

[2]Østergaard-Nielsen, Scriptura Sacra, 98.

> konnte nur ein neues Verständnis der Bibel die Befreiung bringen.[1]

All this is to say that the Scripture is not in the power of man to manipulate or control in any way. Luther himself made this expressly clear: "Hoc est dicere, quod Scriptura non est in potestate nostra, nec in facultate ingenii nostri, sed humiliari et orare oportet, ut inclinet ad nos illum."[2]

## Man's Response to the Address of God

Headley underscores the intimate relationship of Luther's spiritual experience to his theology of the Word. These are his comments:

> By his exegesis Luther expressed the relation between Christ and the mediating Word and the continuing presence of Christ through the Word. Yet this exegetical method was inextricably related to and a result of his spiritual pilgrimage and the discovery of a gracious God.... the religious can never be divorced from the theological in Luther...[3]

Two distinctions must be drawn between late medieval religiosity and the type of spiritual experience and response we have noted in Luther. The medieval fear of hell, which Luther shared before the Turmerlebnis, was a more generalized terror inspired by the totality

---

[1]Adolf Sperl, Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1959), pp. 56-57.

[2]W. A. 3, 516.

[3]Headley, Luther's View, 25.

of the threats of the church and popular piety.[1] Over against that fear we must set the quite specific, holy awe fostered by the personal, direct Word of God which Luther heard in the Scripture. The second distinction is seen in the word of grace which Luther heard from the same God. The paradoxical character of that word Luther found most aptly in I Sam. 2:6 "The Lord kills and brings to life." Let us note further the incidence of these concepts:

> Pastors and listeners are soon parted, but it is impossible to separate the Word of God from your conscience, which heard the Word. These will make your heart, yes, the world, too big for you to escape on that Day, you will stand condemned, for the Word will condemn you..[2]

> Quia omnis homo wenn er recht an Gott denckt, so erschrickt er, quoniam sentit peccata et non kans lassen, si audit deum nominari u., quia scit deum feind esse peccatis.[3]

> Denn das gewissen ist da, das fület und weis, das Gott den sundern feind ist und verdammen wil und Gottes zorn nicht entgehen noch entfliehen kan, darumb mus es zittern, beben und zagen, erblassen und erkalten als fur einem blitz oder donnerschlag. Darumb mus Christus dagegen mit gewalt zufaren und solche süsse, freundliche, tröstliche wort ins hertz propffen, das er die schweren, bittern und greulichen gedancken hinweg neme und den Vater auffs aller

---

[1]cf. George Gordon Coulton, Five Centuries of Religion (Cambridge: University Press, 1936), III, pp. 9ff.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed. XXII, 40.

[3]W. A. 28, 120.

> lieblichste eindbilde, wie ein hertz wündschen sollte.[1]

This new fear does not debilitate, rather: "if one would begin to become wise, one must fear God. One must truly regard it as God's Word, then everything can be learned easily."[2] The corollary to the action of God is that man is held by the force of the Word: "I am a captive, and cannot free myself. The text is too powerfully present, and will not allow itself to be torn from its meaning by mere verbiage."[3]

If what we have said about the Word of God is true, then we must go on to assign a new and loftier role to the preacher or teacher. The word of the preacher is God's Word, but not in such a way that he shall boast of his importance as preacher. The moral for the congregation is to honor the preached and taught Word as God's Word, but not to glorify the man who brings the message.

> But you now have the Word of God in church, in books, in your home; and this is God's Word as surely as if God Himself were speaking to you.[4]

> Would to God that we could gradually train our hearts to believe that the preacher's words are God's word and that the man addressing us is a scholar and a king.[5]

---

[1]W. A. 28, 121.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed. XIII, 385.

[3]Luther, Am. Ed. XL, 68.

[4]Luther, Am. Ed. XXII, 527.

[5]Luther, Am. Ed. XXII, 526.

> Therefore do not regard the person, but give ear to what is said. Pay no attention to the speaker. See whether it is God who is speaking and acting through this person. If it is God who is speaking, then submit to Him. When burgher or peasant hears a pastor, he must say: "I do indeed hear and recognize the voice of the pastor. But the words which he utters are not his. No, he would be incapable of them. It is the sublime majesty of God that is speaking through him." Likewise, when a lowly pastor comforts me, then I must be discerning enough to say: "It is not you who is speaking to me. The voice is yours indeed but it is really God who is speaking through you."[1]

Now, all this emphasis on the Word of God spoken through men might seem to encourage the preacher and expositor to be arrogant. The opposite is the case. As the theme of humility has been observed specifically or by implication in a number of the interpreters studied in the preceding historical sketches, so also Luther refers constantly to it. He makes some very penetrating caveats that give a distinctive flavor also to this old wine as it is put in the new wineskin. The following excerpt is a "standard" example:

> And certainly it is much to be marvelled, that such excellent men as Peter, Barnabas, and other /sic/, should so suddenly and so lightly fall, especially in that thing which they knew to be well done, and had also before taught unto others. It is a perilous thing therefore (as Dr. Staupitius often admonished us), to trust to our own strength, be we never as holy, never so well learned, and although we think ourselves never so sure of that we know; for in that whereof we think ourselves most sure, we may err and fall, and bring ourselves and others into great danger. Let us therefore diligently, and with all humility, exercise ourselves in the study of the holy

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed. XXII, 508.

> Scriptures, and let us heartily pray that we never lose the truth of the Gospel.[1]

Over against the strong tradition of humility as a virtue to be practised by the aspiring Christian Luther protests that self-conscious humility is really a type of work-righteousness.

> Die demut ist szo zart unnd szo kostlich, das sie nit leyden kan yhr eygen ansehen, szondern das bild ist allein dem gottlichen gesicht behalten, ...den wer do kund sehen sein demut der kund sich selb urteyllen zur selickeit und were gottes gericht schon auss.[2]

Humility is a hidden thing always, but presumptuousness is evident, and Luther is disturbed by some of his students:

> What do we have to be so puffed up and proud about? We have many students here who are so full of knowledge after they have been in Wittenberg half a year that they suppose that they are more learned than I am....That is what pride does.[3]

In view of Luther's assurance of the truth of his own views as he defended them at Worms and elsewhere, his statements on humility may seem mere formal, meaningless protestations. The frequency of occurrence of statements like the following, however, gives evidence of his sincerity:

---

[1]Martin Luther, A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, Prepared by Philip S. Watson (London: James Clarke & Co., 1953), p. 121. /Galatians/

[2]W. A. 7, 536.

[3]Luther, Am. Ed., XII, 189.

> Not that I find I have grasped anything of a Wisdom so high, so broad and so profound beyond a few meager rudiments and fragments; and I am ashamed that my uninspired comments on so great an Apostle and chosen instrument of God should be published.[1]

The continuing interplay of pride and humility is employed polemically beyond Luther's self-judgment and his quizzical attitude toward self-assured students. Pedersen introduces this perspective:

> The literal-carnal exegesis is that position over against the Scripture which does not infer the consequence of the faith relationship to the Word as the mediator of the divine truth. In the Dictata the protagonists of the fleshly literalism (those who are caught up in the old essence of the letter) are not the theologians of the church, but the Jews and heretics, together with all the proud, arrogant men (proprietarii opiniones /W. A./ 4, 317, 27) who will not humbly listen to and hear God's speaking, but seek only support for their own ideas and idols in the Scripture. Their relationship to the scripture is basically false, because they seek to be masters of it, rather than humbly to listen to it self-critically. That is the beginning and essence of heresy: a positing of self-righteousness, and that means with respect to the study of scripture, that one distorts the testimony according to one's own bias. The supremacy of the word over the "I" of the individual must always be asserted, the word is sacrosanct, the individual must listen, inquire, submit himself, continually be corrected;...[2]

Pedersen supports his arguments by reference to the Gloss on Ps. 118 (119), 2: "Beati qui scrutantur testimonia eius, non qui torquent ea ad suum sensum."[3] The comparison of the offending interpreters to the

---

[1]Luther, Galatians, 16.

[2]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 415.

[3]W. A. 4, 281.

Jews who reject Christ calls forth the general condemnation of wrong interpretation as killing, crucifying Christ afresh.[1]

There is then no native affinity which enables a man to understand the Word through some kind of "point of connection,"[2] no developed intellectual or spiritual/moral affinity which gives insight. Understanding is continually, completely dependent on the gift of grace in the Holy Spirit. "Scire ergo filium dei esse incarnatum pro salute nostra et extra eum omnes esse in peccatis, hec est eruditio ista, intellectus iste: quod nemo nisi per spiritum sanctum cognovit."[3]

## Living Word and the Life to Come

The theological and practical implications of all this Luther summarizes thus:

> God converses with us, governs us, provides for us; and Christ hovers over us -- but invisibly. And even though there were clouds above us impervious as iron or steel, obstructing our view of heaven, this would not matter. Still we hear God speaking to us from heaven; we call and cry to Him, and He answers us. Heaven is open, as St. Stephen saw it open (Acts 7:55); and we hear God when He addresses us in Baptism, in Holy Communion, in confession, and in His Word as it proceeds from the mouth of the men who proclaim His message to the people.[4]

---

[1]W. A. 4, 318.

[2]cf. Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 425.

[3]W. A. 3, 172.

[4]Luther, Am. Ed. XXII, 201.

Emil Brunner draws a continuing, ultimately eschatological inference from some words of Luther spoken in this mode:

> "Whenever God speaks or with whomsoever He speaks, whether in wrath or in grace, the one addressed is immortal. The Person of God who there speaks and His Word show us that we are creatures with whom God wishes to speak for all eternity and in immortal fashion" (I Cor. 15:31). In this formula of Luther is expressed a genuinely Biblical Christo-centric faith in immortality. Not in the way we are made but in God's creative summons have we our eternal life, which has not ceased to bear witness to itself, even in our sinful mortal mode of existence. Our eternal life is rooted in the "thou" of God who addresses us, not in the "I" which we speak to ourselves (I Cor. 15:55 ff.).[1]

We submit yet another appraisal, from Thomas F. Torrance, because it contributes to several themes which we must study later. A closer study of the context of the following quotation will indicate the broad ramifications of the theme of the Living Word in Luther.

> Because this Word is none other than Christ Himself who was crucified and resurrected for us, this is the Word which slays and makes alive, and operates law and Gospel, by crucifixion and resurrection.[2]

## One Man against the Many

Conceivably, Luther might have enunciated all of the foregoing

---

[1]Emil Brunner, Eternal Hope, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 107.

[2]Thomas F. Torrance, Kingdom and Church: A Study in the Theology of the Reformation (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956), pp. 40-41.

ideas in a most commonplace, unprovocative style without causing any untoward opposition or polemicizing. After all, he himself consistently drew selectively upon the exegetical works of his predecessors, thereby acknowledging some evangelical value in their works. We may well use Oberman's delightful turn of speech concerning subjective orthodoxy, the will to conform to and continue the tradition of the Church, combined with objective heresy, the actual contradiction of that teaching.[1] These terms describe the works of those earlier Biblical scholars who had indeed said something of the gospel by means of their allegorizing, but entertained a heretical, indeed an anti-Christian potential in their methodology.

Luther did not provoke, protest, polemicize because of personal hostility, neurosis or subjective fanaticism. Neither was it sheer independence of mind which led him to "disregard them /the commentators/ all and put them away."[2] Rather, it was conformity with Luther's theology, in which we find "the expectation that what is needed for salvation can be arrived at from the correct understanding of the word of Scripture." The search for this understanding, like the expectation of the word of salvation "is unparalleled in the surrounding milieu."[3]

---

[1]Oberman, Harvest, 427.

[2]Luther, Erlangen Ed. 22, pp. 54-5. Quoted by Wood, Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation, 19.

[3]Ebeling, Theology Today, XXI, No. 1, 37.

## Intimations of Independence

However we may adjudge and describe Luther's hermeneutics, then, and there are innumerable varieties of such analysis, we recognize uniqueness which is only a part of his total unique activity in the "surrounding historical milieu." For Luther set a pattern for radical change in exegesis in at least three vital areas. First, he abandoned the accepted mode of Biblical-systematic elucidation of the Scripture, such as could be found in Lombard's Sentences or Thomas' Summae. This is a factor quite generally overlooked in the analysis of the hermeneutical revolution at the Reformation. Luther's systematic works, while heavily supported by Scripture, were not a replacement for the explicitly exegetical studies as the primary work of the theologian. A second feature of the new approach was the abandonment of the time-honored system of glosses and scholia in favor of something more like running commentary with major words and phrases illumined not atomistically, but out of the total context of Scripture. This change, also, has been given but little mention. The area of change which has called forth the most critical analysis, and criticism, is Luther's rejection of the Quadriga, or four-fold method of interpretation.

In each of the three divisions above Luther's change reflects some subjective involvement. In the first area, where he engaged with the scholastic theologians and the great doctors of the church, the personal relationship which he saw established between God and man by

Christ is not properly developed theologically by dialectic. To use the modern idiom, dialectic involved an I-It relation rather than an I-Thou. Sixteenth century terminology speaks rather of the role of reason here, but the intent is the same. For a whole complex of reasons, the mind of man can not understand God as He is. Man is weak, sinful, proud, etc. In other words, he is subjective by nature, and this natural subjectivity deludes him, even as it perverts his entire understanding.

We must be careful lest we construe this perspective as anti-rationalist as some critics of Luther maintain. Reason has its place for the man who is already a Christian, for the "fool in Christ." The danger lies in the misuse of reason and presumptuous pride in the capacity of reason. Some of Luther's early theses will illustrate major aspects of his perspective:

> /From the Disputation against Scholastic Theology, 1517/
> 35. It is not true that an invincible ignorance excuses one completely (all scholastics notwithstanding);
> 36. For ignorance of God and oneself and good works is by nature always invincible.
> 43. It is an error to say that no man can become a theologian without Aristotle. This is in opposition to common opinion.
> 44. Indeed, no one can become a theologian unless he becomes one without Aristotle.
> 45. To state that a theologian who is not a logician is a monstrous heretic--this is a monstrous and heretical statement. This in opposition to common opinion.
> 46. In vain does one fashion a logic of faith, a substitution brought about without regard for limit and measure. This in opposition to the new dialecticians.
>
> /From the Heidelberg Disputation, 1518/
> 20. He who wishes to philosophize by using Aristotle

> without danger to his soul must first become thoroughly foolish in Christ.[1]

Instead, then, of these corrupt cogitations, let men hear the Word of God in faith. Thus they will avoid error and heresy.[2]

Inasmuch as the glosses and scholiae comprised the select wisdom of the church they represented traditional material for representation and set the traditional form for classroom communication. Luther's break at this point might appear to be one more evidence of his intransigent privatism which could ignore the totality of the Christian community.

## Luther and the Church

We must make clear at this point that the subjective element we expect to delineate more precisely in this thesis is not a subjectivity of individualism, of privatism, the right to private judgment or the like. Throughout his life Luther was haunted by the jeering question, "Are you alone right? Do you alone have the truth?" This was the judgment of his opponents at Worms: "What audacity to arrogate to himself alone a knowledge of the Scriptures against all the doctors of the Church and

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXI, 11, 12, 41.

[2]Luther, Lenker, I, 240; XII, 191, 430. Luther, Am. Ed. XII, 49; 282 ff; XXII, 283; Prenter, Spiritus Creator, 196-7.

to be wise above all others!"[1] The reformer's defence was that such a situation was not unprecedented in the church.

> And this is a wonderful matter, that God preserved the Church, being yet but young, and the Gospel itself, by one only person. Paul alone standeth to the truth; for he had lost Barnabas his companion, and Peter was against him. So sometimes one man is able to do more in a council than the whole council besides. Which things the Papists themselves do witness. And for example they allege Paphnutius, who withstood the whole council of Nicaea (which was the best of all that were after the council of the Apostles at Jerusalem), and prevailed against it.[2]

Luther had no intention of dissociating himself from the historic church and its community. Without assuming that our analysis is complete we may nevertheless set forth some evidences which will clarify this preliminary statement on Luther's relation to the church. Pelikan supports our contention in a notable statement in relation to Luther's view on the Sacrament:

> In Luther's exegesis of "participation in the body of Christ" these two belonged together, the individual and the church. Whatever was significant for the one was significant for the other as well, for the only true individuality was in the church. Hence his exegesis included both meanings of "participation": that the Lord's Supper made individuals more personally aware of the meaning of Christ, and that it brought them together more closely in the church. Thus in the Lord's Supper the Holy Spirit strengthened and nourished the corporateness of Christian faith and life. Many

---

[1]Mackinnon, James, Luther and the Reformation, 4 Vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1925) II, p. 301. Cf. C. R. I., 225.

[2]Luther, Galatians, 120. V. also W. A. 32, 340.

> Reformation scholars have failed to realize that the church was perhaps more prominent in Luther's exegesis than it had been in any exegete since Augustine.[1]

As a believer who has found his one-ness in the many-ness of the church, the reformer expresses a deep protective affection for the membership.

> Seeing then that the Church is so soft and so tender a thing, and is so soon overthrown, men must watch carefully against these fantastical spirits; who, when they have heard a few sermons or read a few leaves in the Holy Scriptures, by and by they make themselves masters and controllers of all learners and teachers, contrary to the authority of all men.[2]

As Luther understood Augustine at this point the universal church throughout the world had the right and responsibility of judging and recognizing true and false dogmas (jus judicandi et cognoscendi). The problem was that the officials of the church had presumptuously seized this as their peculiar right.[3] Even so, with a kind of poetic justice, the ambitious ecclesiastics were frustrated in the matter of the essentials of the faith and left to express their powers in lesser matters, judgments of canon law, for example.

> Saepe me moverunt Gregorii et aliorum autoritas. Papa non rexit ecclesiam, sed Gregorius, Hieronymus, Augustinus, Ambrosius. Papa ist allein bliben in

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed., Companion Volume, Introduction to the Exegetical Writings, J. Pelikan, pp. 201-2. Cf. Luther, Lenker X, 170, 443-44.

[2]Luther, Galatians, 59-60.

[3]v. Headley, Luther's View, 84-85.

controversiis iudicialibus.[1]

The autoritas of the doctors was not beyond question or reproach, for even they could write böse ding.[2] Power, wisdom, holiness and piety were no safeguards in themselves against false teachings.[3] This is not a personal judgment of Luther's, but an application of the principle that the Scripture was perspicuous and that it judged all other authorities, including the fathers.[4]

> Therefore neither am I to be believed, nor the church, nor the Fathers, nor the Apostles, no, nor an angel from heaven, if we teach any thing against the Word of God; but let the Word of the Lord abide for ever: for else this argument of the false apostles had mightily prevailed against Paul's doctrine...For no man saith willingly that the Church erreth, and yet it is necessary to say that it erreth, if it teach any thing besides or against God's Word....Therefore neither is the Church, nor Peter, nor the Apostles, nor angels from heaven, to be heard, unless they bring and teach the pure Word of God.[5]

This generous criticism and general disavowal of the authority of the fathers, the ecclesiastical leaders and the great doctors of the church does not leave the interpreter isolated and without aid. He depends on the better guide, the Holy Spirit Himself:

---

[1]W. A., TR 1, 8.

[2]W. A., TR, 1, 45.

[3]W. A. 47, 256.

[4]Headley, Luther's View, 83-84.

[5]Luther, Galatians, 78. v. also W. A. 20, 744-45.

> Wherefore let us, casting away all such pernicious and absurd follies, enter upon a new road of interpretation, caring naught for having disregarded the footsteps of those who have gone before us. For we have the Holy Spirit as our guide, not setting before us in Moses a heap of absurd allegories, but teaching us through him the mightiest truths and the mightiest things which took place between God the Creator and man the sinner, and Satan the author of sin.[1]

## Churchly Allegory

The development of the allegorical method which occupied so prominent a role in the history of hermeneutics (v. supra passim) was trenchantly set forth in the mnemonic lines "Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia." This four-fold method of interpretation was normative for late medieval Scriptural exposition.[2] This means that in the same way as the content of the faith had been established in the traditional teachings, so the method had been established through which the faith-content was verified and elaborated. The interrelation of content and method is so close that Ebeling can affirm:

> Diese Stabilität der H. /Hermeneutik/ zeigt nicht nur, dass die wesentlichen Probleme der Theologie des MA, gerade auch die methodologischer Art, an anderer Stelle lagen (obschon die traditionelle H. dafür die

---

[1]Luther, Lenker I, 286.

[2]It is significant that the contemporary Catholic theologian Chenu uses the term "axiom" for the Merkvers. M. D. Chenu, Is Theology a Science? trans. A. H. N. Green-Armytage (London: Burns and Oates, 1959), p. 86.

> grundlegende Vorbedingung war), sondern vor allem, dass die h.e Konzeption Ausdruck einer kirchlichen Grundentscheidung ist, mit der die Kontinuität der kath. Kirche in Zusammenhang steht.[1]

The predilection for a distinction between the literal and spiritual interpretations which is the essence of the Quadriga betrays a basic metaphysical understanding in the Roman church which was not at all congenial to the new theology of Luther.[2] On this basis alone we would expect Luther to perceive the incongruity of such a method for him. From another, and less frequently considered point, the Quadriga, especially in its allegorical development, was vulnerable to Luther's criticism. The Achilles heel at which we direct our attack is the subjectivity of this mode of interpretation.

On the preliminary level of criticism, we know that allegory gave opportunity for flights of the most unbridled fancy, that some extreme instances of this type of exegesis were nothing more than prideful displays of technical virtuosity. We know that the most absurd arguments were supported by the "spiritual" interpretation of Scripture. Without some restraint laid on the expositor, captiousness and whimsy could easily fit the literal verba to a Procustean bed of ideas.

At yet another level, the critique pertains to the Roman Catholic

---

[1]Ebeling, "Hermeneutik," 249.

[2]Ebeling, Theology Today, XXI, No. 1, 42. Cf. Gogarten, The Reality of Faith, 18.

church, rather than individual working within it. Thus, in a telling statement, Prof. T. F. Torrance has written, "the element of objectivity in the tradition is subordinated to a massive subjectivity in the mind of the Church."[1] C. S. Lewis' aphorism is also apropos: "The truth is not that allegory is Catholic, but that Catholicism is allegorical."[2] When the church, in the defensible attempt to establish pura doctrina, fixed the meanings of all the symbols within the schemes of allegory, she vitiated the dynamic of the revelation. Citing Lewis again, "Into an allegory man can put only what he already knows."[3] Erik Erikson makes a similar judgment:

> Having attributed a real existence to an idea, the mind wants to see this idea alive, and can only effect this by personifying it. In this way allegory is born. It is not the same thing as symbolism. Symbolism expresses a mysterious connection between two ideas, allegory gives a visible form to the conception of such a connection. Symbolism is a very profound function of the mind, allegory is a superficial one. It aids symbolic thought to express itself, but endangers it at the same time by substituting a figure for a living idea. The force of the symbol is easily lost in the allegory.[4]

---

[1]T. F. Torrance, Theology in Reconstruction (London: SCM Press, 1965), p. 68.

[2]C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 322.

[3]C. S. Lewis, Letters, ed. W. H. Lewis (London: Bles, 1966), p. 271.

[4]Erikson, Young Man Luther, 182. cf. "Fix the meaning of a symbol, and you have fallen into the commonplace of allegory." Horace Gregory, D. H. Lawrence, Pilgrim of the Apocalypse (New York: Grove Press, 1933), p. 105.

These strictures do not apply with the same force to typology. The difference is in the reference to history: allegory does not take it into account, typology rests on a historical fulfilment.[1]

The Scholastic theologians, with their penchant for ordering logically what existed in the tradition, displayed the kind of allegorizing Catholicism simplistically described above. Although Chenu gives Thomas Aquinas high marks for rejecting symbolism in his scientific theology because of the threat posed by Hugo of St. Victor to make of allegorizing the ultimate and supreme task of the theologian, this contemporary Catholic returns rather lamely to defend the virtues of allegory.[2] Ebeling takes pains to set Thomas within the allegorists, but concedes more sobriety and restraint to his efforts as he points out the primary role which Thomas accorded to the literal and historical and his emphasis on finding clear evidences elsewhere in Scripture to support the allegorized insights.[3] More generously, Miss Smalley suggests that both Albert and Thomas may have been too advanced for their contemporaries,[4] a concession which does not change the historical profile significantly.

---

[1]G. W. H. Lampe, "The Reasonableness of Typology," Essays on Typology (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 31.

[2]Chenu, Is Theology a Science? 85-87.

[3]Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 128-136.

[4]Smalley, Study of the Bible, 275.

Luther and Allegory

Consistent with this tradition as he had been taught it, Luther, on his own admission, began as an allegorizing exegete. His statement has become almost trite by repetition:

> Da ich ein Mönch war, war ich ein Meister auf geistliche Deutung, allegorisirte es Alles; darnach aber, da ich durch die Epistel zum Römern ein wenig zum Erkenntniss Christi kam, sahe ich, dass mit Allegorien und geistlichen Deutungen nichts nicht war; nicht was Christus bedeutet, sondern wer und was er ist. [1]

The evolution from this allegorizing monk to the reformer who would say "Origen, Jerome and all the other allegorists are alike involved in the greatest folly" [2] is an epic which has been given masterful scrutiny by Ebeling in Evangelische Evangelienauslegung, by Pedersen in Luther som Skriftfortolker and by Prenter in his whole analysis of the spiritual break-through of the reformer. The sketch which we present here is not intended as a summary of those findings, but as a simple statement of some of the elements involved in the transition and what they imply for our study.

It is evident that Luther was not only aware of the Quadriga but careful in his use of the terminology. [3] In his early lectures on the

---

[1] W. A. TR 1, 335.

[2] Luther, Lenker I, 154.

[3] "...a very beautiful allegory, or rather by an anagoge..." Am. Ed. I, 87, on Gen. 2:7.

Epistle to the Hebrews it is evident that he accepted the conclusion that the spiritual understanding was available not for all, but for advanced students.[1] Some continuation of this view, but with a significant modification in its essence is Luther's contention that allegory might be profitable for believers, but ineffective against unbelievers.

> Quia Galatae fideles erant, allegoricis doctrinis audiri potuerunt...Infidelibus vero allegoricis nihil potest probari...aut certe quod Apostolus Galatis ut infirmioribus paterna solicitudine et volens rem similitudine et volens rem similitudinibus et allegoriis deliniat, ut verbum eorum captui attemperet.[2]

Elsewhere again Luther denies to allegory any "value for giving proof"[3] such as can come from the historical account. In deference to that priority of the historical Luther came to the point where he admitted allegory only where the text itself allowed it.

> Ego quidem ab eo tempore, quo cepi historicam sententiam amplecti, semper abhorrui ab Allegoriis nec sum iis usus, nisi vel ipse textus eas ostenderet, vel interpretationes ex novo Testamento possent sumi.[4]

---

[1]Luther: Early Theological Works, ed. and trans. James Atkinson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 117.

[2]W. A. 2, 550.

[3]Luther, Am. Ed. I, 233.

[4]W. A. 42, 173. Lectures on Genesis, 1535-37.

The strong Christocentric emphasis in the maturing Luther[1] draw the four lines of the Quadriga together so that the content of the Scripture is still proclaimed in the same scope, but is focussed in Christ. The emphasis on the Incarnation and Redemption emphasizes the historical as over against the un- or anti-historical allegory, the emphasis on faith militates against the materialistic metaphysic, and the emphasis on the dialogical or personal confrontation rather than the dialectical rational element further emasculates the allegorical interpretation.[2]

Luther buttresses his rejection of the Quadriga by appeal to the Fathers, and significantly evidences thereby that he does definitely relate himself to the Church, the Church of the Apostles and the Ancient Fathers:

> Verum quicquid sit de illis sensibus, certum est necque apostolos necque antiquos doctores observare, qui tropologiam, allegoriam, misticum seu misteria et spiritualem sensum prorsus indiscrete accipiunt, anagoges vero nec verbo meminerunt.[3]

Does Luther's depreciation and avoidance of allegorical interpretation complete the hermeneutic revolution? Is it now sufficient to contend for the historical/literal interpretation for the clear, pure

---

[1]Roland H. Bainton, Warren A. Quanbeck, E. Gordon Rupp, Luther Today (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1957), pp. 74ff.

[2]V. Ebeling, Ev. Evang., 201, and Ebeling, Theology Today, XXI, No. 1, 37.

[3]W. A., 57, 96.

understanding of the Word? No, the resolution is not, unfortunately, that simple. Man may yet obscure the holy truth by his literalism or by some other offence to the historical sense, he may lay claim to spiritual insights which also impose foreign presuppositions on the Word and corrupt it.[1] These problems, as they were actually posed to Luther in his later career, must also be confronted and incorporated in our analysis.

The substance of the preceding section has been gleaned from a broad cross-section of Luther's works, supported by a variety of secondary references. Is it a fair statement, consistent with the working principles of Luther when confronted with a specific text or a specific theological issue? We submit the evidence gathered from three major theological and exegetical confrontations to corroborate the analyses above.

## Clarification Through Strife I
## Latomus and Scholasticism

In May, 1521, Luther received a copy of the work by Latomus (Jacobus Masson) of the University of Louvain. Latomus, spurred by Luther's answer in March, 1520, to the 1519 condemnation of Luther's works by the Louvain professors, returned to a defence of the Louvain position. Luther was at the Wartburg in hiding, but decided to make

---

[1]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 413.

his reply to Latomus at once, even though he lacked an adequate library for checking his sources in the works of the fathers. These circumstances, however, give added force to the document. Luther necessarily wrote out of his central, personal convictions, unable as he was to make a tidy research project out of the response. The year represents a crucial one, not too far removed in time from Luther's evangelical discovery, just after the Diet at Worms, at a time when he was engrossed not only in apologetic and polemic writing but was occupied with his great translation of the New Testament.

The University of Louvain was a stronghold of scholastic theology. The action of condemning Luther's works and burning his books indicates further their sense of commitment to the honor of the papacy. The themes which Latomus dealt with were central to the Reformation proclamation, and the issues were joined on the interpretation of the Scriptures involved in those themes. Luther returns again and again to the theme of man's total corruption by sin, the grace of God in Christ, and the continuing mercy of God to the sinner who is and remains simul justus et peccator.[1]

The Turmerlebnis is a real presence in the tract as evidenced by the recurrence of terms like "righteousness of God, "justified by

---

[1]This introductory material is drawn largely from the Introduction to the tract. Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, Against Latomus, pp. 133-260.

faith," "he who believes in Christ has a merciful God."[1] Luther maintains "I have to some extent tested these spiritual matters in experience"[2] which seems at least an oblique reference to the Tower. Certainly, all is of grace,[3] Christ and his atoning cross are everywhere. To help us understand the Word "there is one teacher, even Christ."[4]

God is a God who is to be feared and obeyed before all men.[5] He kills and makes alive.[6] The Word of this God resists man so he cannot force it to his way of thinking.[7] At the close of the argument Luther urges his colleagues to take over some of this kind of response so he may fulfil a pastoral role which is clearly on his conscience, "to help poor ordinary people." For when "God's Word is taught...God...is then present."[8] Clearly, then, claims which we make whether as to our interpretations or our own righteousness have the awesome character of being "before God."[9] The disputing is not about "an

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 227.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 258.

[3]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 156, 208.

[4]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 217.

[5]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 146.

[6]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 148.

[7]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 181.

[8]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 147.

[9]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 182.

ordinary man" but about "the fearful and eternal Majesty."[1]

Typically, the court of last resort is the Pauline word.[2] The abundance of citations, not the least important being those from the letter to the Romans, gives evidence of this lifelong trait of Luther's.

In response to the accusation that he is immodest in attacking the theologians of Louvain, Luther defends himself ably and cites Biblical instances of men who were bold to defend God's truth.[3] Over against this defence he sets his accusation of the men of Louvain who are proud[4] and the sophists likewise.[5]

Luther marvels at theological method which assumes a point of connection, a similarity such that "the Eternal Life should be compared to a momentary one!"[6] Rhetorically, he challenges the sophists to compare their scholarly competence in the Sentences with their inadequate teaching of the Word of God.[7] He wearies of Latomus' method of argument and laments how "other interpretations were added to those interpretations, so that now there is no limit to the increase of glosses

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 240.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 155.

[3]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 142-43.

[4]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 150.

[5]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 160.

[6]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 260.

[7]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 259.

on glosses and, in the confusion of words, we are led into the utmost confusion."[1]

As to the historic Church, again, the Fathers did err, they were often human, erring, inconsistent, and asleep.[2] Luther will not give unqualified approval of any of the fathers, but urges attention to them "especially Augustine!"[3] Neatly put: "Behold, this is my faith <u>just because it is the catholic faith</u>."[4] /Italics mine./

More technically, there are figures of speech, metaphors, in the Scripture, which must not be interpreted literally.[5] Judging the words by the Spirit, men may still come to understand the ancient word of the Scripture, if they do not look only at the surface.[6] But Latomus is guilty of arbitrariness in interpretation simply because he must refute Luther.[7] "When Latomus is the teacher everyone is free to allegorize and play with Scripture as he pleases."[8] There are those who interpret

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 236-37.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 151.

[3]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 216.

[4]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 213.

[5]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 168.

[6]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 177.

[7]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 166.

[8]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 179.

figures of speech at "choice" or "whim."[1] The Louvain "theologizers"... "distort and condemn" Scripture.[2] And "sophistic envy is so blind that it cannot even grasp ordinary common sense nor the rudiments of a schoolboy's learning."[3] Although he is accused of being ungrateful and insulting to St. Thomas, Luther maintains that he is not ignorant of the great theologian, yet remains convinced "that scholastic theology is nothing else than ignorance of the truth and a stumbling block in comparison with Scripture."[4]

If Luther were a heretic he would not be moved by Latomus' kind of figurative interpretation.[5] Augustine was right, "Figurative language proves nothing."[6] Time after time Luther harks back to the simple, clear, lucid literal text. What is the meaning "in this present verse?"[7] There is a sharp emphasis on the Incarnation, the humanity of Christ. Note the trenchant injunction near the end of the piece:

> He who wishes to discuss sin and grace, law and gospel, Christ and man, in a Christian way, necessarily discourses for the most part on nothing

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 195.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 187.

[3]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 185.

[4]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 257-58.

[5]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 166.

[6]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 167.

[7]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 188.

> else than God and man in Christ; and in doing this one must pay the most careful attention to predicating both natures, with all their properties, of the whole Person, and yet take heed not to attribute to this what belongs exclusively to God or exclusively to man. For it is one thing to speak of the incarnate God, or of man raised up to God, and another to talk simply of God or of man.[1]

## Clarification Through Strife II
## Erasmus and Humanism

If allegory and the spiritual interpretation represented by that system have now been properly criticized and discarded, the obvious simple remainder in exegetical options is the historical-literal interpretation. Both Reformation historians and students of the history of interpretation point to the emergence of historical understanding of the Scripture as one of the primary achievements of the Reformation, one which has borne fruit in the more recent and highly developed historical study of the Bible.[2] Inasmuch as the historical-literal sense had never been entirely excluded from consideration, even by the allegorists who must use this sense as a base for their spiritual constructions, Luther's views must be seen as an evolution from, and an adaptation and modification of previous attitudes. Before we attempt to delimit these changes more specifically, it is necessary to refresh some

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXII, 257.

[2]Luther, Romans, pp. xxix ff.; Grant, Bible in the Church, 109 ff.

background material and sharpen some of the issues.

The central presuppositions, and therefore also the central problems of the relations of historical and spiritual interpretation set forth above in the problems related to allegory, were metaphysical. Given the basic premises of idealist philosophy, the exegete assumed a primal world of ideas which were understood by their reflected images in the physical world and the world of human history. Under Nominalist influences, as well as under the forces of a renewed Aristotelianism, the idealist view came under severe questioning. Subtly, and very often quite unconsciously, men accepted a view of the world and history as real in themselves. How, then, can the words used by men within this sphere of reality convey meanings of a heavenly sphere which is by definition, of a quite different order? The school of Antioch, by its emphasis on the historical interpretation had, as we have observed above, encountered the hazard and accusation of heretical statements. Quite remarkably, Athanasius came out of the school of Alexandria, but so effectively expressed the resolution of the Christological problems in the homoousion and kindred statements as to be acceptable to both East and West after long struggles. It is not so incredible, then, that a man like Augustine should also stand in a mediating position and should still be acceptable in much of his writing to the sixteenth century reforming spirit.

These questions of history, of reality and of human language were examined most closely in their technical connotations by the

movement generally designated as Humanism. By the sixteenth century humanistic thought had developed and matured. Although it was basically a cultural phenomenon it was not to be avoided by the ecclesiastical world. Both the old church and the new-born Reformation group must reckon with it.

Professor H. Richard Niebuhr may have been correct in his judgment that "Roman Catholicism has always been inclined toward a Christian or "otherwordly humanism,"[1] but this did not protect the church of the sixteenth century from sharp criticism by humanists, even the moderate ones. The humanists had been impressed by classical antiquity and had drawn from those sources a new respect for human values in and of themselves. The supreme challenge of this quest is stated by Emil Brunner: "It is as though man in history were seeking humanitas and true humanism without ever being able to find them."[2] A deep intuition informed many of the sixteenth century humanists that humanitas was to be found in the One true Man, but the correlation with Him was not uniformly or successfully made.

The strong rationalistic trend of the humanists led to a clash with scholasticism. Erasmus and others of his intimate circle were convinced that scholastic logic was despicable. They alleged that this

---

[1]H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937), pp. 20-21.

[2]Brunner, Eternal Hope, 86.

logic was detached from the reality of life, hence of the human. As a result of this primary error education became meaningless. Humanism thus became the champion of a new educational program stressing content above method.[1] The movement accepted an optimistic view of man, including the idea that he was fundamentally good and capable of improvement by education. Thus, as Gilmore says, "Learning, whether sacred or profane, would increase piety."[2]

The philologist Budaeus testified to the vital role of Erasmus in realizing these objectives of humanism:

> Was anyone born under such inauspicious Graces that the dull and obscure discipline (scholasticism) does not revolt him, since sacred literature, too, cleansed by Erasmus' diligence, has regained its ancient purity and brightness? But it is still much greater that he should have effected by the same labour the emergence of sacred truth itself out of that Cimmerian darkness, even though divinity is not yet quite free from the dirt, of the sophist school. If that should occur one day, it will be owing to the beginnings made in our times.[3]

This judgment certainly implies also that Erasmus will provide valuable data for our concern for hermeneutics, and ultimately with the subjective element. Erasmus' notorious subjectivity of tremulous fear has been commented on at length by biographers and critics. We may deal with this matter briefly since it is patent personal weakness, and

---

[1]Ong, The Barbarian Within, 156.

[2]Gilmore, World of Humanism, 206-07.

[3]J. Huizinga, Erasmus, ed. Edward W. Bok (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 169.

since the more subtle elements of the subjective are more apropos for our consideration. Luther chided Erasmus for desiring to conduct theological debate in a mood of compromise "in order to ensure that no occasion for public disorder arises."[1] For many years before he wrote against Luther, Erasmus had been vociferously disowning any connection with the vitriolic German reformer, and even with his own uncle, John Reuchlin. Thus he wrote to Albert of Brandenburg October 19, 1519:

> When Luther's books were published, they grasped them as if they were a handle and used them to link the cause of language and learning, that of Reuchlin and of Luther, and indeed my own, together in the same bundle, presenting their case poorly as well as distinguishing badly between the objects of their attack. For what has literary study to do with a matter of faith? And how am I involved in the cause of Reuchlin and Luther? But by this trick they have mixed these things together so that they may burden all friends of learning with a common reproach.[2]

Margaret Mann Phillips reports on the conversations between John Colet and Erasmus and states that they discussed the "psychological interpretation of the Bible."[3] Here the normative character of humanitas is evident along with a negation of the abstractions of sophistic logic. The excitement and sense of achievement which Erasmus experienced in this mode of inquiry stemmed not from the novelty, but from the deep

---

[1]Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1957), p. 90.

[2]John C. Olin, ed., Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Desiderius Erasmus (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 143.

[3]Margaret Mann Phillips, Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950), p. 44.

conviction and assurance that knowledge could lead to faith. This principle of erudition has been labelled as the prime characteristic of Erasmus' theory of interpretation by John William Aldridge, who goes on to call this a "theologically poor, but historically beneficial position."[1] However, Erasmus added what appears to be a destructive qualifying element in this project of education to faith. Even though his own editions of the Scripture were intended to enable the ploughboy to read and understand the holy word, he let it be known in his argument with Luther that he felt a public, rational discussion of some of the exalted truths of God would be harmful to the simple.[2]

We have warrant for attributing Erasmus' reaction against pure rationalism to his early experiences with the Brethren of the Common Life.[3] Education and culture did not equip one to get beneath the surface of the Scriptural word. Piety is the essential key to open the mind. In this warm admonition from the Paraclesis Erasmus stated this point with evangelical zeal:

> The journey is simple, and it is ready for anyone. Only bring a pious and open mind, possessed above all with a pure and simple faith. Only be docile, and

---

[1]John William Aldridge, The Hermeneutic of Erasmus (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 58.

[2]Luther, Bondage, 77. v. also Phillips, Erasmus, xxiii, and Aldridge, Hermeneutic, 96.

[3]Phillips, Erasmus, 49-50.

> you have advanced far in this philosophy. It itself supplies inspiration as a teacher which communicates itself to no one more gladly than to minds that are without guile.[1]

Professor Torrance concludes that the interplay of psychological and moral functions together with Erasmus' penchant for matters of language, are the reason for his predilection for "the primacy of second intentions and the pursuit of oblique meaning."[2] Thus, too, Erasmus lost direct contact with the Word. Ultimately:

> Erasmus could never bring himself to be greatly concerned for doctrinal questions, nor indeed for their natural or direct signification. All that really mattered is that they should supposit for inward moral experience.[3]

It is vital to our subequent argument to allege against Erasmus that he betrayed in this complex relation to Scripture a basically historicist view. The validity of this accusation gains strength from Aulen's analysis of one of the major defects in historicism:

> Of greater importance from the religious point of view, the fundamental defect of historicism lies in the fact that, like the idealistic theory of immanence, the character of revelation as being a revelation of God is obscured. It directs the attention of faith to a human life of the highest moral and religious quality and to high and pure human thoughts about God and his kingdom. But that which is essential for faith does not have reference to human thoughts, however high and noble, nor to the life of any human personality, however

---

[1]Olin, Christian Humanism, 96.

[2]Torrance, Theology in Reconstruction, 83.

[3]Torrance, Theology in Reconstruction, 83.

> completely "religious." ...It does not confuse humanity even at its best with the divine. Faith is related to nothing but God Alone. When it speaks of revelation it has reference only and entirely to God's revelation, to God's way down to mankind from above; to this and nothing else.[1]

It is not only that Erasmus would draw from the static scripture a power to transform man into a better man ethically, it is even more that his relativizing of his own situation indicates that he finds in the data of his experience no ordering center. He was intensely aware of the ambiguity of all that is.[2] Since he was not of a mind to draw an inference of unity from the varied particulars[3] he withheld judgment and withdrew to the safer realm of language. Where, in his writings, do we find any eschatological hope or true vision of the outworking of God's purposes among men?

Ironically, we perceive in that work which was originally produced in the most offhand way, and which Erasmus looked on with some degree of unhappiness, a most perceptive analysis of the vanity of trusting in man's best accomplishments. As Huizinga says: "Moriae Encoomium alone was to be immortal....For only when humour illuminated that mind did it become truly profound."[4]

---

[1]Aulen, Faith, 48.

[2]Huizinga, Erasmus, 147-48.

[3]Huizinga, Erasmus, 135.

[4]Huinzinga, Erasmus, 99.

We may well argue further that the way in which Erasmus resolved the problem of the relation of words and things depended on a historicist position. That is to say that he saw words given established meanings by human cultures. Through philological inquiry and through broad readings in the general literature of any given language-group, a rational, simple perspicuous meaning could be determined for words. Erasmus did not probe the ontological questions raised by this view. As he brought forth the clear and simple meaning of the Scripture to be applied to the ethical situation of man he argued in literalistic fashion that if a command were given to man by God then the possibility of man's obedience of that command was implied. With genial optimism Erasmus expected that the leaders of the church would amend their ways once their errors were pointed out and that lay Christians both high and low would become worthy soldiers of Christ through the spread of Scriptures and the renewal of teaching. Likewise he accepted at face value the Biblical statements about the justice of God. According to the human linguistic mode these statements had an absolute character that was severely tested by accounts such as that of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

In order to reconcile such opposing statements in Scripture and to defend his rationalistic view of the freedom of man's will Erasmus was not above employing the old stratagem of allegorizing.[1] His forte,

---

[1]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 304-05.

however, continued to be his stubborn appeal to the literal meaning of words as he interpreted them. In the popular misunderstanding and confusion of the early years of the Reformation it is to be expected that the methods of Luther and Erasmus should have been viewed as not only related, but well-nigh identical. The bitter controversy which erupted between the two men in 1524 and 1525 indicates that the contrary is true, that Luther sensed no kinship with Erasmus on hermeneutics at the deeper levels of the problem. In the light of subsequent developments it was a most unfortunate decision which Erasmus made, belatedly and reluctantly, to challenge Luther on the subject of the freedom of the will and in the domain of Biblical interpretation. In response Luther produced a classic statement in The Bondage of the Will, significant from its contribution to systematic theology, but more intriguing and less shop-worn as a source of hermeneutical insights.

Although Erasmus' Diatribe was the immediate cause of Luther's forceful response in The Bondage of the Will, Luther's views were not an ad hoc development to meet the challenge of the humanist. Heinz Blumm states in his article "Luther's View of Man in his First Published Work":

> Relentlessly he drives home the point that the comparative humanism of the world in which he lives is the principal foe that needs to be battled. The extreme theocentricity of Pauline theology is to be enthroned again....He is convinced that a Christian, far transcending the bounds of mere Moral Man, is, or should be, concerned with incomparably deeper issues beyond the question of conspicuous misdemeanor. As a matter of fact, what Luther suggests in his first publication is that a Christian qua Christian is

> troubled by matters quite different from those of easily recognizable moral conduct.[1]

Clearly, Luther thus early had set himself in anti-humanist and anti-moralizing stance.

Luther's response to the new philological aids to exegesis which Erasmus developed was a selective acceptance. We can readily determine the point in Luther's lectures on the letter to the Romans where he began to employ the textual helps of Erasmus, but Luther remained free to reject technical conclusions on the literal meaning of the text and he was not at all impressed by the theology, expressed or latent, of the philologist.[2]

By 1525 the strained relations between the two reform leaders had been intensified by their own reactions and suspicions, and by the urgings of their partisans. Whether Luther displayed an unseemly wrath against what he considered the crass perversion of Scriptural truth in the Diatribe, whether Luther wrote in careless subjectivity or not must be determined by scrutiny of the text with a special view to such problems. In the realm of the subjective elements which we have set for study here, we find some other data, very enlightening and typical.

---

[1]Heinz Bluhm, "Luther's View of Man in his First Published Work," Harvard Theological Review, XLI (April, 1948), 105-06.

[2]cf. Aldridge, Hermeneutic, 125.

Luther recognizes his reluctance to admit that he could have been in the wrong, but also points out with devastating insight how men delude themselves about this defensiveness:

> For I know well enough by experience how reluctant we all are to admit defeat. As Quintilian says, there is none who would not rather appear to know than to learn. And this remains true, despite the proverbial refrain which all around us keep mouthing (more because it is in popular use, or rather misuse, than because it expresses their heart): 'I want to learn; I am ready to be taught and to follow the better when I am told it; I am man, and prone to err.'[1]

Further, Luther indicates that he has held the same view as Erasmus in the matters under discussion, that he has been deeply troubled by them, and "would have continued so, and would be under their influence to-day, had not constraint of conscience and evidence of facts forced me on to a different road."[2] The phenomenon indicated by the words "forced me" was evidenced in universal experience, including that of Augustine and Bernard, so that

> men are different when occupied with words and disputations from what they are when occupied with experience and practice. In the former case, their speech does not accord with what they previously felt; in the latter, their feelings do not accord with what they previously said.[3]

Although it might seem "presumption" on Luther's part to range

---

[1]Luther, Bondage, 131.

[2]Luther, Bondage, 110.

[3]Luther, Bondage, 114.

himself against so great a host of saints and scholars as Erasmus recruits[1] Luther dares "to claim that I have understanding, and that you have not--though I freely grant, as I must, that you have eloquence and I have not."[2] Admittedly that judgment, "the enlightening of the Holy Ghost, the special gift of God" which "belongs to faith, and is needful for every Christian, even for a layman" is an individual matter, which "benefits none but him who has it."[3] In response to the recurring accusation that the Wittenberg reformation has guiltily stirred up needless strife Luther refers to the tumults precipitated by apostolic preaching[4] and exonerates himself from a charge of self-deception in this matter and in respect to his own sense of the rightness of his view by allusion to his vocation, unhappy as the results of that work may be for the world's peace. The Word of God "demands to be asserted with invincible and unshakeable zeal"[5] and the Professor of Bible is called to this onerous and despised task.

Emboldened by such deep personal confidence, Luther ventures to assail Erasmus on faulty applications of his own principles. He accepts and reasserts the function of intention but questions the

---

[1]Luther, Bondage, 109.

[2]Luther, Bondage, 63.

[3]Luther, Bondage, 124.

[4]Luther, Bondage, 91.

[5]Luther, Bondage, 90.

Diatribe's application:

> Yet the Diatribe still errs and goes wrong in that it neglects the purpose of the simile, which should be our main concern, and catches contentiously at the words of it instead. 'Knowledge of meaning must be sought from the reasons for speaking,' says Hilary; it is not afforded by the terminology alone. So it is here: the force of a simile depends upon its purpose. Why then does the Diatribe ignore the point for the sake of which Paul uses this simile, and catch at what he says without reference to the intent of the simile?[1]

Moreover, the precise meanings of words as the philologist has assumed them must be corrected by a prior knowledge of the things to which the words refer. Thus "Words must be regarded (as the formula runs) in the light of the subject-matter and of the speaker's intention."[2] Ignorance of the things to which words refer has been the occasion of much error in theology.

> Moreover, it is a mere logical fancy that there is in man a middle term, willing as such; nor can those who assert it prove it. The notion sprang from ignorance of things and preoccupation with words. As though things always corresponded in fact to the verbal analysis of them. (The Sophists make endless errors over this.)[3]

These strictures do not militate against the clarity of Scripture for Luther.

> I have noticed that all heresies and errors in handling the Scriptures have come, not from the simplicity of the words, (as almost all the world tells us), but from

---

[1]Luther, Bondage, 231.

[2]Luther, Bondage, 264.

[3]Luther, Bondage, 147.

> not regarding the simplicity of the words, and from hankering after figures and implications that come out of men's own heads.[1]

In the positive application of that principle Luther has "shattered the figures and glosses of men, and taken the words of God in their simple sense."[2]

In an open criticism of the style of Erasmus, Luther contends that teachers should be bound by this same directive.

> We should speak according to a definite rule, in sober and proper terms; for what is wanted in teaching is simplicity and logical correctness, not the high-flown figures of a rhetorical persuasive.[3]

The hazard of such cavalier treatment of words is indicated by this comment and parody:

> As I said above, we shall end by overturning all usage of words and language and saying: 'All men are no man, and all things are nothing' -- referring one term to the thing as it is in itself, and the other to something extraneous that might come upon it or happen to it![4]

Such clear, strong, simple words are not the private province of the learned, as if only they could confront such reality. "These expressions do not make Scripture, nor do they need adapting to the various capacities of the hearers--unless, of course, one likes

---

[1]Luther, Bondage, 192.

[2]Luther, Bondage, 207.

[3]Luther, Bondage, 138.

[4]Luther, Bondage, 143.

creating difficulties where none exist."[1]

According to Martin Greschat, one of the significant results of the controversy on perspicuity between these two champions was a refinement of Luther's definition of terms. Greschat concludes:

> Von hier aus unterscheidet Luther zwischen einer äusseren und einer inneren Klarheit der Schrift: die letzere wird allein durch das Wirken des Hl. Geistes vermittelt, die erstere dagegen durch die Verkündigung von jenem grundlegenden Heil in Christus...Im Wort geschieht die Bewegung Gottes in Christus auf den Sünder zu. Das äussere Wort ist demnach nicht nur in keiner Weise selbst thematisch, sondern von ihm kann angemessen überhaupt nur in seiner Umfassung vom Wirken des geistes geredet werden.[2]

Such a development is further indication of Luther's concern for content as distinguished from Erasmus' concern for method.[3] The real target of Luther's criticism, then, is what the Diatribe says, rather than the method of reaching conclusions. "Reason" is at work here but not even a consistent Reason, since the judgments are not "according to equity." "If a God who crowns the undeserving pleases you, you ought not to be displeased when He damns the undeserving!"[4] Acting

---

[1]Luther, Bondage, 108.

[2]Martin Greschat, Melanchthon neben Luther (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1965), pp. 89-90.

[3]Aldridge, Hermeneutic, 128. Aldridge here draws a corollary between the position of Erasmus and that of contemporary "new hermeneutics." In his judgment, Luther in his time and Barth in ours have successfully challenged this position.

[4]Luther, Bondage, 234.

by Reason, men

> demand that God should act according to man's idea of right, and do what seems proper to themselves--or else that He should cease to be God! 'The secrets of His majesty,' they say, 'shall not profit him; let him render a reason why He is God, or why He wills and does that which has no appearance of justice in it.[1]

The problem of the justice of God so construed, and the problem of the ethical potential of man seen by reason have this outcome, "reason thinks that man is mocked by an impossible commandment."[2] By such logic we are diverted from the revelation of God Himself.

But how, given the disagreements among Christian men, given the apparent contradictions, can a simple revelation of God be found in the Scripture? Luther answers unequivocally that it is in Christ.

> For what solemn truth can the Scriptures still be concealing, now that the seals are broken, the stone rolled away from the door of the tomb, and that greatest of all mysteries brought to light--that Christ, God's Son, became man, that God is Three in One, that Christ suffered for us, and will reign for ever? And are not these things known, and sung in our streets? Take Christ from the Scriptures--and what more will you find in them? You see, then, that entire content of the Scriptures has now been brought to light, even though some passages which contain unknown words remain obscure.[3]

It is essential that we observe the emphasis on the Incarnate God who <u>acts</u>. Luther did not here draw out the metaphysical implications of

---

[1]Luther, <u>Bondage</u>, 232.

[2]Luther, <u>Bondage</u>, 158.

[3]Luther, <u>Bondage</u>, 71.

the Incarnation, but His statements have instead the vigor of the second article of the Apostles Creed:

> Here, God Incarnate says: 'I would, and thou wouldst not.' God Incarnate, I repeat, was sent for this purpose, to will, say, do suffer, and offer to all men, all that is necessary for salvation; albeit He offends many who, being abandoned or hardened by God's secret will of Majesty, do not receive Him thus willing, speaking, doing and offering.[1]

The possibility of man's acting is not inherent in man, but is directly related to God's acting:

> For if I am ignorant of the nature, extent and limits of what I can and must do with reference to God, I shall be equally ignorant and uncertain of the nature, extent and limits of what God can and will do in me--though God, in fact, works all in all (cf. I Cor. 12.6). Now, if I am ignorant of God's works and power, I am ignorant of God himself; and if I do not know God, I cannot worship, praise, give thanks or serve Him, for I do not know how much I should attribute to myself and how much to Him.[2]

In the final pages of The Bondage of the Will where Luther urges his opponent to stick to what he knows, the language is much more moderate than are the implications. Erasmus' own words are turned against him. "You say that 'you have wandered far from the mark, if you are ignorant of Chirst.' I think that you yourself see how the matter stands."[3] In those remarkable words, "I think that you yourself

---

[1]Luther, Bondage, 176.

[2]Luther, Bondage, 78.

[3]Luther, Bondage, 320.

see" we hear the pained admission of the pastor that some men fail to recognize the saving acts of God in Christ. Put in yet another way, Erasmus failed to see that "revelation implies salvation."[1] In this context, as Aulen puts it, "The first and foremost question is: What is the nature of the hidden God?"[2]

By his frequent references to the matter of the hidden God in The Bondage of the Will Luther indicates how keenly he was aware of this question, and his treatment comprises some of his most distinctive and seminal contribution both to the problem of the freedom of the will and to the problem of interpretation. As later Luther research indicates, there are few topics in Luther's theology which display his virtuosity to such advantage as does the Deus absconditus--Deus revelatus formulation. Unfortunately, this depth of insight inevitably also produces a myriad of interpretations and qualifications.

There is no equivocation in Luther's statements about man's proper fear before the Deus nudus. "God in His own nature and majesty is to be left alone; in this regard, we have nothing to do with Him, nor does He wish us to deal with Him."[3] Such judgments lead John Baillie

---

[1]Harold B. Kuhn, "The Problem of Human Self-transcendence in the Dialectical Theology," Harvard Theological Review, XL (January, 1947), p. 67. The context of the phrase is strikingly analogous to our argument supra.

[2]Aulen, Faith, 54-55.

[3]Luther, Bondage, 170.

to comment:

> A speculative knowledge of God as He is in His naked majesty would not and could not save, but would rather terrify and destroy. A saving knowledge, a knowledge that meets our situation as regards conscience and justification and reconciliation, must be veiled knowledge. There God appears not in His naked majesty but in His humiliation.[1]

Yet it is precisely in this humiliation that so many find the stumbling block. As Wingren says, "Just because God accomplished his purpose in suffering and downfall he is fathomless. If he sat majestically on high he would be easy to understand."[2] With characteristic boldness, Luther states that it was different for the godly. "So the godly mind is not shocked to hear that God is in death or in hell; though either is more frightful and foul than a hole or a sewer."[3] A great Luther scholar like Heinrich Bornkamm seems to flaunt the extremes of the conclusions that may be drawn from such a statement when he characterizes Luther's views thus:

> Der Glaube fragt in den unsichtbaren Hintergrund des geschichtlichen Raumes hinein: Wo ist Gott in diesem wirren Geschehen?
>
> Ueberall--antwortet Luther. Er wohnt nicht etwa nur in den lichten und edlen Kräften, sondern er gibt auch den wilden und dämonischen ihr Leben. Auch der

---

[1]John Baillie, Our Knowledge of God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 191.

[2]Gustaf Wingren, The Living Word (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), pp. 205-06.

[3]Luther, Bondage, 88.

> Teufel, das Böse in der Welt empfangen ihr Leben aus Gottes Allmacht.[1]

In a less provoking way Luther suggests some of the practical questions even Christian men might raise.

> As to why some are touched by the law and others not, so that some receive and others scorn the offer of grace, that is another question, which Ezekiel does not here discuss. He speaks of the published offer of God's mercy, not of the dreadful hidden will of God.[2]

> How things that are bad for us are good in the sight of God is known only to God and to those who see with God's eyes, that is, who have the Spirit.[3]

To label these apparent contradictions "paradoxes"[4] does not remove the offensiveness. Better to admit that

> it is the highest absurdity by far--foolishness to the Gentiles and a stumbling-block to the Jews, as Paul says (cf. I Cor. 1.23)--that God should be a man, a virgin's son, crucified, sitting at the Father's right hand![5]

The proper answer to this difficult situation is the response of faith. "We must show some measure of deference to His Divine wisdom by believing Him just when to us He seems unjust."[6] "Faith's

---

[1]Heinrich Bornkamm, Gott und die Geschichte nach Luther (2 Aufl.; Lüneburg: Heliand-Verlag, 1947), pp. 6-7.

[2]Luther, Bondage, 169.

[3]Luther, Bondage, 203.

[4]Luther, Bondage, 97.

[5]Luther, Bondage, 201.

[6]Luther, Bondage, 314.

object is things not seen. That there may be room for faith, therefore, all that is believed must be hidden."[1] The deplorable ambiguities of the definitions of "faith" result here in varied views among Luther scholars. John Dillenberger reports Karl Heim's understanding of the experience of Luther in faith as giving him "a new intuition of the problem"[2] while Emanuel Hirsch construes faith as the "state in which all things are unified."[3] Since our own commentary requires some further analysis of faith we defer comment until a later section of this treatise.

Although we may not subsume adoration under faith, this response belongs to the proper attitude of man to the Majesty.

> So this is the time and place to adore, not your 'Corycian caverns', but the true Majesty in its awful, wondrous, oncomprehensible judgments, and to say: Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. (Luke 11.2). We are nowhere more recklessly irreverent than when we trespass upon and argue about these inscrutable mysteries of judgments.[4]

Luther stresses that such a view of the Scriptures does not seek for the how of the divine truths, which we do not need to know.[5] Thus,

---

[1]Luther, Bondage, 101. v. also Wingren, The Living Word, 206.

[2]John Dillenberger, God Hidden and Revealed (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), p. 41.

[3]Dillenberger, God Hidden and Revealed, 51.

[4]Luther, Bondage, 216. cf. also 208, 99.

[5]Luther, Bondage, 73.

"content with the words of God"[1] the believer waits for the ultimate full revelation of God, waits in hope of the light of glory:

> But the light of glory insists otherwise, and will one day reveal God, to whom alone belongs a judgment whose justice is incomprehensible, as a God Whose justice is most righteous and evident--provided only that in the meanwhile we <u>believe</u> it, as we are encouraged to do by the example of the light of grace explaining what was a puzzle of the same order to the light of nature.[2]

If such language as Luther employs above seems the height of Christian pious hopes from the perspective of the theologian, these words must appear as the worst obscurantism to the logician or the epistemologist. Would it not be both advisable and proper to devise a rationale incorporating the oppositions which Luther rather fancied using?

> All that is believed must be hidden. Yet it is not hidden more deeply than under a contrary appearance of sight, sense and experience. Thus, when God quickens, He does so by killing; when He justifies, He does so by pronouncing guilty; when He carries up to heaven, He does so by bringing down to hell....Thus God conceals His eternal mercy and loving kindness beneath eternal wrath, His righteousness beneath unrighteousness.[3]

Dillenberger has examined the way in which Erich Seeberg attempted to make the principle of opposites programmatic in Luther's theology, in what Seeberg termed a "metaphysic of opposites."[4] Seeberg traced

---

[1]Luther, <u>Bondage</u>, 203.

[2]Luther, <u>Bondage</u>, 317.

[3]Luther, <u>Bondage</u>, 101.

[4]Dillenberger, <u>God Hidden and Revealed</u>, 51-52.

this emphasis back to Tauler and the via negativa.[1] Yet Seeberg himself concluded that the deus absconditus and deus revelatus "are one in thought and nature."[2] Again, Karl Holl "defines hiddenness as a path at the end of which lies revelation."[3]

Some scholars have attempted to find an esthetic path by which to arrive at the revelation through hiddenness. What we have reviewed earlier on the relations of words and things hardly enlightens our present problem, but Marcia Colish, in her analysis of the epistemology of Augustine makes these significant statements:

> As figures of speech go, aenigmata are admittedly difficult to grasp. But their very obscurity may also enable them to function as accurate signs. For Augustine, verbal signs, whether literal or figurative, represent truly, if partially, really existing things.... Metaphorical signification is far better suited to express realities that are themselves intrinsically obscure and difficult to understand. An aenigma, like any other figure of speech, is designed to communicate information.[4]

This understanding through enigma as metaphor can be related to the conclusion of Denis de Rougemont on the work of the artist who "incarnates a reality": "It happens that the expression veils what is

---

[1]Dillenberger, God Hidden and Revealed, 46-47.

[2]Dillenberger, God Hidden and Revealed, 52.

[3]Dillenberger, God Hidden and Revealed, 57.

[4]Colish, Language, 79. v. also the following page for more comment on Augustine's appraisal of his use of paradoxes.

expressed, while manifesting it at the same time to our senses."[1]

Professor Nathan A. Scott, Jr., emerges from his inquiry into the problem of Mystery with a quite mystical assessment:

> The province of Mystery...is...the realm in which I come to know the essential hiddenness of reality before any finite exploration, and yet it is also a realm which is suffused with a sense of encountering the things and persons in my environment in the dimension of presence.[2]

But both these types of analysis, the one of express scrutiny of the Luther materials and the other of the general esthetic-literary probing into the problem of hiddenness, miss the mark. It was not Luther's intention by this clever device to resolve an issue which for him remained a matter of the Word of God, and of faith, not feelings or thoughts. This excerpt from his commentary on the story of the Canaanite woman recorded in Matthew 15 is a succinct summary:

> This was written to comfort and teach us all to know how deeply God hides his grace for us and how we should cling, not to our feelings or thoughts about Him, but strictly to His Word....For this reason our heart must turn aside from such feelings and with firm faith in God's Word seize and cling to the Yes deep and hidden beneath and beyond the No, just as this woman, and give God His due when He judges us. Then we have won Him and caught Him in His own words.[3]

The merits of Luther's insights here are affirmed by Paul Tillich's

---

[1]Denis de Rougemont, The Christian Opportunity, trans. Donald Lehmkuhl (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1963), pp. 88-89.

[2]Nathan A. Scott, Jr., The Broken Center (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 173.

[3]W. A. 17/2, 203. Quoted in Harrisville, His Hidden Grace, 81.

statements that Christ as the "New Being" is the "only paradox and the source of all paradoxical statements in Christianity." Further, "The 'offense' given by the paradoxical character of the Christian message is not against the laws of understandable speech but against man's ordinary interpretation of his predicament."[1] Arthur C. Cochrane concludes that Karl Barth maintains "God is hidden to us because fellowship between God and man rests upon His grace....God's hiddenness signifies God's jusgment upon human perceptions and conceptions."[2] Dillenberger ascribes similar views to Paul Althaus in his studies of hiddenness in Luther, especially the hiddenness in revelation.[3]

By his attention to the problem of suffering, Paul Althaus develops a final underscoring in this present sequence of reviews of hiddenness, and provides a transition to our next major section. This is Dillenberger's summary paragraph on Althaus:

> The believer also recognizes God's hiddenness but he recognizes God hidden in suffering. He sees God's revelation behind his judgment, his "yes" hidden in his "no." Faith dares in the "strange work of God" to see God's own true work hidden.[4]

---

[1]Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), II, p. 92. For a somehat contrasting, but Christ-including, Roman Catholic statement, v. Trophime Mouiren, The Creation (London: Burns & Oates, 1962), p. 82.

[2]Arthur C. Cochrane, The Existentialists and God (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 127-29.

[3]Dillenberger, God Hidden and Revealed, 58-59.

[4]Dillenberger, God Hidden and Revealed, 58.

## Clarification Through Strife III
## The Schwärmer

There was no unanimity on such an understanding of the function of experience as Luther set forth, and the group variously designated "spirituals" or "Schwärmer" were insistent on a more direct derivation of religious conclusions from the special position which they asserted. As allegorization derived its force from the foregone conclusions of an ontology based on idealism, and Erasmus' brand of humanism espoused an interpretation supported by the clarity of human linguistic and philological knowledge, the Spirituals constructed their interpretive citadel on the ground-works of the direct working of the Holy Spirit upon them.

The very religious character of this opposing position made the dialogue an extremely difficult one on both sides. Carré reports on Melanchthon's diffidence in the early period of the confrontation:

> Melanchthon was at first impressed by their knowledge of the Scriptures, their claim to direct inspiration by the Spirit, and their pretension to foretell the future by means of visions. He feared to condemn them lest he might extinguish the Spirit and was greatly perturbed over their arguments against infant baptism, especially as they appealed to Luther's teaching in support of their claims.[1]

The emphases of the sectarians on vital personal religion, on the function of faith, on the necessary operation of the Holy Spirit, coupled

---

[1]Carré, Realists and Nominalists, 75.

with their subsequent unfortunate history of persecution and martyrdom, made them an opponent not so much formidable as elusive. Once the differences were brought into the open the controversy raged bitterly, very likely because of the strong personalities on both sides engaged in the debates, and because of mutual intransigence, but aided and abetted because of the mutual frustrations of communication. Although not all the Spirituals were unlearned, there were many who had only the rudest of intellectual equipment, and the special character of the position seemed to cancel out viciously the earlier theological training of the learned, so that common premises for conversation were increasingly difficult to establish.

Whether or not the genealogical lines were known or recognized by the Spirituals, they did have genetic roots in preceding major movements of thought in the West. One of these ancestors must be nominalism, not only because of its latent strength all through the sixteenth century as a viable option,[1] but because of its character of reaction to scholasticism with all that this involved. In labelling universals "fictiones," the nominalists questioned the possibility of a knowledge of things in themselves. There was a resulting disjunction in the relation of words and things so that, as Dorner says, "words, as

---

[1]On this point v. Professor Torrance's summary, Theology in Reconstruction, 179.

the signs of thoughts, are in reality mere signs of signs."[1] The reaction to this theological skepticism as we observe it in a man like Ockham became either a taking refuge in the arbitrary authority of the church or in emphasizing the alternative of an unreasoning faith or fideism. Religious minds turned toward the practical and devotional aspects of the Christian faith, as witness the Brotherhood of the Common Life at Deventer, and the great mystical writers such as Eckhart, Suso, and Ruysbroeck.[2] The ultimate hazards of such a position are indicated by Étienne Borne in a catalog of theological monsters which includes "the nominalists of the fourteenth century, enemies of reason, who introduced fideism into theology and put out the eyes of faith, reducing it to a blind certitude."[3]

As to a humanism in the spirituals' views, mention of Deventer in the preceding paragraph may remind us of the experiences of Erasmus with the Brethren in his early life, so that we might expect some line of descent through him. The nexus lies rather in something of their own type of rationalism, in a strong ethical emphasis, and a confidence in man's unique capacities more particularly in his religious responsiveness. As tenuous as this argument of a connection may be,

---

[1]Dorner, The Person of Christ, Div. 2, Vol. 1, 375.

[2]Carré, Realists and Nominalists, 122.

[3]Étienne Borne, Modern Atheism, trans., S. J. Tester (London: Burns & Oates, 1961), p. 88.

we do nevertheless find an allegation of it in the term quoted by H. A. Enno van Gelder from J. Lindeboom, "spiritualistic humanism."[1]

The strongest antecedent of the spirituals is mysticism. Typically individualistic, this reactionary style of outlook, disgusted with the aridities of so much of scholastic thought, like nominalism sought to establish a purer religious base. Gilmore summarizes the principal marks thus:

> This tradition emphasized the reliance on immediate divine guidance, the role of inspiration and the importance of the sanctified individual, whose extraordinary piety made manifest the operation of grace.[2]

Fugitive strains of mysticism attached themselves to diverse movements and individuals. The eminent philologist, John Reuchlin was attracted to the esoteric matter and principles of the Jewish Cabbala.[3] J. A. Dorner ascribes this kind of quest to a sense of spiritual need:

> The mind of the Western nations, dissatisfied with what it possessed, turned its eyes in all directions, inquiring whence it could again draw the spiritual certainty and joy which it had now lost.[4]

---

[1]H. A. Enno van Gelder, The Two Reformations in the 16th Century (The Hague: Martinus Mijhoff, 1964), p. 252. The citation is traced to J. Lindeboom, Een Franc-tireur der Reformatie, Sebastiaan Franck (1952):15.

[2]Gilmore, World of Humanism, 204.

[3]Schwarz, Biblical Translation, 80-84. V. also Lewis W. Spitz, The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 77.

[4]Dorner, The Person of Christ, Div. 2, Vol. 1, 377.

Perhaps too much stress has been laid on the role of mysticism in shaping the religious views of Martin Luther. He knew and loved the great mystical writings of the age, particularly the German Theology, which he rated so highly. His spiritual father, Staupitz, attempted to aid Luther in his religious torments by the comforts which he himself found in a practical mysticism, where "the experience of sweetness" was a "sign of election; mysticism...the basis of certitude of salvation."[1] Not only did Luther fail to find Staupitz's kind of calm assurance in mysticism, anything of those emphases was radically modified before entering his personal world of piety.

The Schwärmer or "fanatics" with whom Luther engaged in so much and such bitter controversies in the 1520's bore the varied impress of these late medieval movements. This diversity is inevitable inasmuch as the constitution of the group is so fluid and covers so wide a range. Carlstadt, the former colleague of Luther, moved into this orbit, and to attendant criticism and ignominy. Zwingli came to be reckoned in this number long before the Marburg Colloquy. The real extremists, men like Müntzer, Storch and Zwilling seem more remote because the engagement with them was more generalized and less of a direct pamphleteering confrontation.[2]

---

[1]Oberman, Forerunners, 140. V. also Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand (New York: Pierce and Smith, 1950), pp. 42-44.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed. XXXVII, 18, n. 14.

With such a wide spectrum of personalities, generalizations tend to be sadly overdrawn. The terms used by Copleston, however, with reference to the mystics, do transfer rather adequately to the Schwärmer. The key terms are "extension of the idea of experience" and "speculative rationalization of religious experience."[1] This concept is the basic principle alleged by Rupert E. Davies concerning Zwingli's justification of his Biblical interpretation. Davies writes:

> Zwingli replied that faith cannot be formed from the words of the Bible, but that the latter are to be understood under the guidance of faith and must yield to faith....Thus the principle has emerged that faith is the true interpreter of Scripture.[2]

But this extension of subjectivity progresses yet further to take a place prior to the Word. This is the critique of Regin Prenter in Spiritus Creator, that the Schwärmer, according to Luther, turn the order of outer and inner upside down.[3] Prenter footnotes support for his conclusion from Luther:

> Das sie nicht zuvor durchs eusserlich wort zum geyst sondern zuvor aus dem geyst auff das eusserlich wort komen....Sie selbs sind besser und höher denn die Aposteln und wöllens on eusserlich wort und on mittel ynnwendig ym geist lernen, wilchs doch den Aposteln nicht ist gegeben sondern dem eynigen son Ihesu Christo alleyne.[4]

---

[1]Copleston, History of Philosophy, Vol. 3, Pt. I, 194-95.

[2]Rupert E. Davies, The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers (London: The Epworth Press, 1946), pp. 80-81.

[3]Prenter, Spiritus, 254-55.

[4]Luther, W. A. 18, 185.

Gordon Rupp concurs in this judgment also and specifically apropos of Zwingli, of whom he says

> Though he did not deny the importance for faith of the outward word of preaching, he so stressed the spiritual character of communion with God, so detested the thought that the Spirit could make use of outward and physical media, that the sacraments for him became indeed signs and pledges.[1]

The extreme development was to make the experience independent of words or things. "The Schwärmer make the thing, that is, the spiritual experience of faith, independent, and divorce it from outer words" says E. Thestrup Pedersen.[2] The head-on clash of ideas precipitated by this point of view is set forth by Rupp, first citing Müntzer's independent spiritual assertion:

> The heart must be the footstool of God so that man can be sure that God has certainly chosen him for His possession. But before a man can be assured of this blessedness, there come such water floods and such roarings of the same that a man loses all desire to live...a man must not flee these billows but masterfully ride them like a skilled navigator... and thus his heart will be taken hold of by the true spirit of Christ, the possessor of the soul.[3]

Then Luther in effectual response:

> But when you ask these people how one comes by this lofty Spirit, they don't point to the outward gospel, but up into cloud cuckoo land, and they say, "Ah, yes, you must experience what is called 'Waiting,' like me, and then you

---

[1]Rupp, Luther Today, 158.

[2]Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 425.

[3]Rupp, Luther Today, 142.

> will get it. Then a heavenly voice will come to you, and suddenly (just like that!) God will be talking with you.[1]

What emerges so significantly in these polemics is Luther's sense that faith, in this kind of sinful world, must always be mediated by the Word.[2] In a trenchant aphorism recorded in the Table Talk, Luther pointed to the implications of the cavalier treatment of the Word by some of the Swiss reformers: "Definiunt verbum non secundum dicentem Deum, sed secundum recipientem hominem."[3] The undesirable anthropocentrism was countered by a due regard for the Word of the "dicentem Deum" of Luther:

> Alss gross der ist der do spricht, sso gross mussen wyr auch seyn wort achten. Es ist eyn wortt, das er ynn sich selb spricht und ynn yhm bleibt, nymer von yhm gesundert wirt.[4]

Unmoved by such arguments "dieser geyst will nicht gleuben, was Gotts wort sagt, sondern was er sihet und fület."[5]

This exaggeration and distortion of the subjective was most unfortunate because it created reactions against a proper and needful development in theological perspective. As Professor Torrance points

---

[1]Rupp, Luther Today, 142.

[2]Rupp, Luther Today, 160. Cf. W. A. 32, 339; 514. Luther, Am. Ed. XL, 55.

[3]Luther, W. A., T. R. 3, 670, #3868.

[4]W. A. 10/1, 186.

[5]W. A. 18, 206. Cf. W. A. 36, 45, W. A. 37, 632.

out the "transition from medieval to modern thought" involved a "transition from a dialectical to a dialogical mode of thinking, and from thinking of the relations of ideas to thinking to personal objectivity or transcendence."[1] Instead of developing the sense of the human subject over against God as subject, the fanatics' "apocalyptic visions, mystical illumination"[2] were combined with the fact that they "misinterpreted the Word spoken to them as the words of piety which they spoke to themselves."[3] Thus they frightened many of the reformers into a reaction in which even the proper work of the Holy Spirit through the Word was not recognized. Let us grant the validity of Rupp's assertion, "Only in the theology of Calvin, as in the theology of Luther, were the twin concepts Word and Spirit reconciled in their providential harmony."[4] We must still reconcile this theoretical existence of a viable Reformation pneumatology with the strange phenomenon that Prenter's Spiritus Creator of 1946 began with the premise that Luther's doctrine of the Holy Spirit had "the most infrequently"[5] been dealt with as an independent problem.

---

[1]Torrance, Theology in Reconstruction, 97.

[2]Luther, Galatians, 7.

[3]Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 128.

[4]Rupp, Luther Today, 108.

[5]Prenter, Spiritus, 9.

In view of the oppositions of the letter to the spirit in the debate with the Schwärmer on the interpretation of the rightly spiritual, it is important to clarify one key concept in Augustine, who had said so much to this point during his theological career. The question is, what of Augustine and "illumination?" Is there any similarity between his sometimes ambiguous development of this epistemological principle and the "extension of experience" of the Schwärmer? The answer is a thorough-going "No!" To say that the soul becomes aware of God through "certain ideas, forms, or reasons, of things which are immutable and constant... is not the same as saying that the soul gains a direct knowledge of God," writes Gordon Leff in his analysis.[1] Augustine's exegesis stressed the priesthood and the Sacraments through which the Spirit was present and active mediately, not immediately.[2] A rather lengthy quotation from the Confessions will point to the involved process of Augustine's theory with its distinct emphasis on a functioning of the body and the senses within their ascribed limitations, to the completion of the illumination or vision:

> And thus by degrees I was led upward from bodies to the soul which perceives them by means of the bodily senses, and from there on to the soul's inward faculty, to which the bodily senses report outward things--and this belongs even to the capacities of the beasts--and thence on up to the reasoning power, to whose judgment is referred the experience received from the bodily sense. And when this

---

[1]Gordon Leff, Medieval Thought: St. Augustine to Ockham (London: The Merlin Press, 1959), p. 40.

[2]Am. Ed. Companion Vol., 158.

> power of reason within me also found that it was changeable, it raised itself up to its own intellectual principle, and withdrew its thoughts from experience, abstracting itself from the contradictory throng of fantasms in order to seek for that light in which it was bathed. Then, without any doubting, it cried out that the unchangeable was better than the changeable. From this it follows that the mind somehow knew the unchangeable, for, unless it had known it in some fashion, it could have had no sure ground for preferring it to the changeable. And thus with the flash of a trembling glance, it arrived at that which is. And I saw thy invisibility understood by means of the things that are made.[1]

We are not concerned here to extricate Augustine from the lacunae of his incomplete and highly metaphorical statements but rather we must reenforce the charge, even more specifically enunciated, that the Schwärmer were basically much more non-historical than Augustine. We dare to say they were anti-historical. Not even the recurrent emphasis on experience can absolve them of this responsibility, for the experiences in which they gloried were non-historical. They were apart from the human ministry, apart from the preached Word, isolated from the physical elements in the Sacraments, immediate, not mediated, therefore spiritual and not really involved in history.

This matter of experience set within history becomes a central one in our analysis of the Schwärmer. In the preceding section of this chapter we treated of Erasmus and his problem of accepting the strange will of God, now we treat of the fanatics who have difficulty with the strange works of God. As Erasmus attempted to avoid his problem by

---

[1]Augustine, Confessions vii. 17.

insisting that God must work in a way conforming to man's observation of history, that is, in a historicist fashion, our fanatics now seek to avoid the problems posed by the Words and works of God in history by a denial of history, an escape from its apparently ineluctable quality. The matter does not only concern speculative problems, such as those concerning the Sacraments, but the practical problems of the individual lives of men.

The hardships encountered by the Schwärmer, ultimately to be rejected by Catholics, Erasmians and other Protestants as well, afforded ample opportunity for them to experience suffering and even martyrdom for their cause. A truly historical view of faith must be able to accept realistically the totality of life and to find a meaning within the rigorous confines of lived life. The harshest test is adversity in the form of physical trials and spiritual testings. For the Christian man, the man of faith, a meaningful meeting of the adverse factors in this life ought be met not with some Stoic tolerance, but with a response related to faith.

The touchstone for our comparison of the Schwärmer and Luther in their approach to the contingent ills of life is quite properly subsumed under Luther's special word, Anfechtung, applied so often by him in his writings. Roland Bainton defines it:

> The word he used was Anfechtung, for which there is no English equivalent. It may be a trial sent by God to test man, or an assault by the Devil to destroy man. It is all the doubt, turmoil, pang,

> tremor, panic, despair, desolation, and desperation which invade the spirit of man.[1]

Professor Rupp has appraised the difference between Müntzer and Luther at this point:

> He contrasts his own true view of faith with the prefabricated, "phony" faith of Wittenberg. At first sight what he has to say seems to resemble Luther's own "theology of the Cross" and his doctrine of Anfechtung. For Müntzer, too, stresses the need for the Christian to suffer temptation and tribulation. Perhaps Müntzer's most characteristic text is the word from the Psalms: "All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." But while Müntzer stresses the immediacy of this experience of tribulation, faith seems to come as an afterthought, rather than through the very experience itself of Anfechtung; and though he stresses experience...he takes refuge in obscurity when he comes to define how and whence this faith comes.[2]

In contrast to this tentativeness and ambiguity is the virtual programmatic use of Anfechtung in Luther. The relation to other emphases which we have described above is obvious: the element of hiddenness, in that the life-giving act of God is hidden under the killing,[3] and the understanding comes through contrarieties. The nature, purpose and profit of the experience is indicated in statements like this:

---

[1]Bainton, Here I Stand, 31. Cf. Rupp, The Righteousness of God, 105, 235 ff.

[2]Rupp, Luther Today, 141.

[3]Cf. Luther's connection of the killing of the believer, his descent into hell, and his resurrection together with Christ. W. A. 3, 431-32. Wilhelm Pauck notes in his editing of Luther, Lectures on Romans, p. 42 how frequently Luther referred to I Sam. 2:6, "He kills and makes alive."

> Ibi adest promissio crucis. Qui vere adorant, habent crucem vel tentationem a Satana, quia Satan non potest hanc adorationem ferre. Et libet: Christum venisse, sed: vicit Christus pro nobis. Ubi inveneritis locos, dicta de iustificatione, hos diligenter observate, quia Satan ut leo rugiens est inimicus huius articuli....In omnibus peccatis et tentationibus nititur, ut auferat hunc articulum.[1]

The threat of subjectivism in this concept was warded off by Luther in two ways. The first was the emphasis upon the activity of God in all this. As Rupp puts it: man is here the "subject of an initiative and action from God who employs the whole of man's existence as a means of bringing men to awareness of their need and peril."[2] The second limitation stems from this first, and says "you must not lay the cross and sorrow upon yourself."[3] With such safeguards Luther could apply this insight very directly to the whole of the life of faith and to the work of interpreting:

> Without it /Anfechtung/ no man can rightly understand the Holy Scriptures or know what the fear and love of God is all about. In fact, without Anfechtung one does not really know what the spiritual life is.[4]

An outgrowth of this view on trials and sufferings was Luther's doctrine of Vocation. A host of abuses of the principle of a regular call

---

[1]W. A. 20, 746. Cf. Luther, Galatians, 18.

[2]Rupp, The Righteousness of God, 106.

[3]Luther, Lenker XII, 77.

[4]W. A., T. R. 4, #4777. Quoted in Reformation Studies: Essays in Honor of Roland H. Bainton, ed. Franklin H. Littell (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 46.

of the Holy Spirit through the Church gave Luther occasion to ponder the implications of the calling. Carlstadt flagrantly violated all regular structures for determining his role in the Reformation. The Zwickau prophets' activities called forth a letter from Luther to Melanchthon, written at the Wartburg January 3, 1522, urging Melanchthon to prove the spirits, to see "whether they can prove their calling."[1] The Christians of Mühlhausen received this admonition from Luther in regard to Müntzer:

> The Holy Spirit doesn't "talk big" before doing anything: He really does things before talking about them...when Müntzer says God and His spirit have sent him like an apostle, let him prove it with signs and wonders. I have never preached, nor do I wish to preach where I have not been asked or called through men to preach.[2]

Gustaf Wingren has stated acutely the distinguishing marks of Luther's own sense of calling:

> Man's vocation is involved in this hiddenness of the Christian life; in man's vocation the true "mortification" is to be carried through by God's will. There is none of the saintliness prized by man in the work of vocation.[3]

As to his own situation, Luther was both positive and vocal:

> But perhaps you will say to me, "why do you, by your books, teach throughout the world, when you are only a preacher in Wittenberg?" I answer, I have never wanted

---

[1]Enders, iii. 272.

[2]Rupp, Luther Today, 140.

[3]Gustaf Wingren, Luther on Vocation, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 248.

> to do it and do not want to do it now. I was forced and driven into this position in the first place, when I had to become Doctor of Holy Scripture against my will. Then, as a Doctor in a general free university, I began at the command of pope and emperor, to do what a doctor is sworn to do, expounding the Scriptures for all the world and teaching everybody....I cannot keep silent or cease to teach, though I would like to do so and am weary and unhappy because of the great and unendurable ingratitude of the people. And even if I were not a Doctor, I am, nevertheless, a regularly called preacher and may teach my own people with my writings....For I have never pushed myself in or desired or asked that anyone should read these writings, but have acted just like other pious pastors and preachers....They do not run and sneak like these worthless, uncalled knaves into the offices of others without the knowledge and consent of the pastors; but they have a definite office and position by which they are driven and compelled.[1]

This contrasting of the Schwärmer and Luther has ranged over a number of key topics. The conclusions drawn above may seem simply broad generalizations stemming from a cursory look at Luther's general stance. Admittedly, the usual exegesis of the basic anti-fanatic texts develops into a study of sacramental viewpoints and express interpretations of texts. To establish the validity of the foregoing analyses, let us look at the evidence of one short document from the exchanges.

Luther's tract "That These Words of Christ, 'This is My Body,' etc. Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics," appeared early in 1527. The numerous references to Zwingli and Oecolampadius seem to disqualify the piece as evidence of the Schwärmer controversy proper. However, Luther evidently had in mind a large number of opponents

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed. XIII, 66.

when he wrote, and the two more moderate reformers are included as sharing some of the fanatical views, even if they do not represent the most extreme instances. We are informed by the editor that more than two dozen writings had appeared between late 1524 and early 1527 opposing Luther's views on the Sacrament, and that Luther alluded to eleven of these in our document, and knew of at least three more.[1]

Critical and contemptuous, Luther alludes to the claims of a special gift of the Spirit: "They think, when they dream something up, it is forthwith the Holy Spirit."[2] Luther pillories the arrogant individualism of Oecolampadius, who he asserts has claimed, "I, Oecolampadius, say that the Scriptures are contradictory."[3] The latent rationalism of their arguments is countered throughout, and bluntly labelled: "In the new interpretation of these spirits it means: 'Faith must believe no more and no farther than one's eyes and fingers point out to him and the reason can measure."[4] "However, if we should judge the articles of our faith and the Scriptures according to our reason and our eyes, as Oecolampadius does here, then indeed every point in the Scriptures is in opposition to the other."[5] "Because your

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 5.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 45.

[3]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 51.

[4]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 47.

[5]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 49.

reasoning is this: Whatever appears to you useless and unnecessary is not true, just as Oecolampadius, like a know-it-all, says..."[1]

Luther's emphasis on the central significance of the Scripture text goes on and on like a set response in the antiphon. But the fanatics "wish that men forthwith would praise them saying, 'Pure spirit, pure spirit you are; pure truth, pure truth you teach!'"[2]

> One side must be of the devil, and God's enemy. There is no middle ground. Now let every Christian see whether this is a minor matter, as they say, or whether God's Word is to be trifled with. Here you have the fanatics and their spirit. I have often said, no ungodly man can have a high regard for God's Word. These fanatics demonstrate forthrightly that they regard the words and works of Christ as nothing but human prattle, like the opinions of academic hairsplitters, which ought fairly to yield to love and unity. But a faithful Christian knows clearly that God's Word concerns God's glory, the Spirit, Christ, grace, everlasting life, death, sin and all things.[3]

So their appeal is, "You must love us along with the Scriptures; you must believe us. We are certain of it without Scripture, and more certain than if the Scriptures said it."[4]

The striking emphasis on the Incarnation and especially the problems posed to faith by the very historic humanity of Jesus Christ indicate how Luther attempted to inject a more positive historical view

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 127.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 22.

[3]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 26.

[4]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 46.

in the controversy. Although at times he could be agonizingly scholastic in his analysis, Luther tended more to the simple assertions of the historic faith, that the Lord Himself had come down from heaven and taken on human flesh. The meanings here are not self-evident: "I can say of God: Of what use is it that he is man? Why must one believe such a difficult thing?"[1]

> How can it be true at one and the same time that God is entirely present, personally and essentially, in Christ on earth in his mother's womb, yes, in the crib, in the temple, in the wilderness, in cities, in houses, in the garden, in the field, on the cross, in the grave, etc., yet nonetheless also in heaven in the Father's bosom?"[2]

Because of the Scripture, faith can accept so incomprehensible a truth: "O how very few there are even among the most learned who have ever pondered this article concerning Christ so profoundly, or have ever believed it so utterly incomprehensible that God should be man and man should be God! But there stands the Scripture, and faith holds it to be certain truth."[3] The impossibility of holding to the dictum "the flesh is of no avail" in its anti-historical implication is castigated by Luther:

> Now you see what a mighty swarm of fanatics the saying can stir up: "Flesh is of no avail." It makes heaven and earth too narrow for Christ's body and hounds him straight out of heaven and out of the Spirit, though the fanatics

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 53.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 61.

[3]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 69.

> had spirited him thither as to a mighty fortress secured with genuine iron walls, to keep him well protected from dishonorable handling by knaves at the altar.[1]

In addition to the historical evidences of the Incarnation, Luther points out the involvement of God as creator and provider:

> Therefore, indeed, he himself must be present in every single creature in its innermost and outermost being, on all sides, through and through, below and above, before and behind, so that nothing can be more truly present and within all creatures than God himself with his power.... He must make everything, both the parts and the whole. Surely, then, his hand which makes all this must be present; that cannot be lacking.[2]

Again, it is the Word which binds God to be present, not alone in the generalized sense, but <u>for you</u>:

> I said above that the right hand of God is everywhere, but at the same time nowhere and uncircumscribed, above and apart from all creatures. There is a difference between his being present and your touching....It is one thing if God is present, and another if he is present for you. He is there for you when he adds his Word and binds himself, saying, "Here you are to find me." Now when you have the Word, you can grasp and have him with certainty and say, "Here I have thee, according to thy Word." Just as I say of the right hand of God: although this is everywhere, as we may not deny, still because it is also nowhere, as has been said, you can actually grasp it nowhere, unless for your benefit it binds itself to you and summons you to a definite place. This God's right hand does, however, when it enters into the humanity of Christ and dwells there. There you surely find it, otherwise you will run back and forth throughout all creation, groping here and groping there yet never finding,

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 84.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 58.

even though it is actually there; for it is not there for you.[1]

The name-calling, accusations and recriminations generously dashed throughout Luther's writings against the Schwärmer have been the grounds for many judgments that Luther revelled here in the opportunity to be his gross, coarse German peasant self. Admittedly the language is harsh, and even in maintaining that he did not enjoy the task Luther employs terms both coarse and ungracious, but if we accept his assertions at face value he did not enlist for the chore, he was drafted and forced to make the defence. Thus, prefaced with an appeal to God Himself, Luther writes: "God knows, I write about such difficult matters with great reluctance, for it is destined to reach such dogs and pigs. But what am I to do about it? The fanatics must bear the responsibility for pushing me to it."[2]

We draw to a close here this section on these three major areas of controversy illustrative of the hermeneutical options considered by Luther. The realm of polemics tends to be an inadequate representation of theological points of view. A controversial figure raises an issue not too germane to the problem, but his objections must be countered. Public support or condemnation develop along highly passionate partisan lines which distract from the central concerns.

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 68-69.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXVII, 68.

Thus we have portrayed Luther's positions here in the main from a negating point of view, although we have attempted to suggest as well certain unique positive stresses which emerged through each representative polemic. Our central thesis, however, remains to be developed as a positive, distinctive and invigorating factor in the Wittenberg hermeneutic. Before we make these constructive statements we must look briefly at the relation of Melanchthon to the polemical confrontations.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE HERMENEUTICS OF MELANCHTHON PROGRESS AND POLEMICS

### Personal History

We must begin with some brief sketching of the relevant personal characteristics of Philip Melanchthon. As the very title of Clyde Manschreck's excellent biography indicates, Master Philip was indeed "Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer."[1] This brilliant, scholarly man, who was to be the responsible and highly regarded colleague of Martin Luther and his reluctant heir to the leadership of the Wittenberg reformation, was by all his instincts shy and withdrawn. We must not judge him as timid, but we see no pugnaciousness in him. He could be dogged, but he did not desire to precipitate controversy. He was confident of his proper abilities, but not forward to speak of himself, his experiences, or his inner life. The limited number of biographies of Melanchthon have a far different tone than do the myriad of Luther biographies. Even Melanchthon's partisans tend to be more restrained, and his enemies have hardly developed the vitriolic angers

---

[1]Clyde Leonard Manschreck, Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958).

of Luther's opponents. We must recognize from the outset that our search for clues to any subjectivity or legitimate subjective element in the work of the Preceptor will be more limited in scope than the Luther segment of this study. We find typically in the Melanchthon corpus the evidence of the reserved person, who writes with scholarly precision. It would be easy, but we contend erroneous, to assume that here was an austere, detached, non-subjective, totally objective theologian at work.

Our first point of difficulty and reward is in the establishment of the personal religious development of the man. We have less indication of any great spiritual crisis here than we do even in the case of John Calvin. There is absolutely nothing in his religious development which approximates the storm and stress of Luther's monastic years or his Turmerlebnis.[1] The rather bland assumption seems to be that Melanchthon accepted his religious convictions largely at second-hand from Luther, after the two began to collaborate at the University of Wittenberg. This is a demeaning judgment, and hardly qualifies Melanchthon for the role he played, or the immense confidence Luther placed in him.

Melanchthon's home offered him the solid, but undramatic advantage of piety. The deaths of his father and grandfather, separated

---

[1]Peter F. Barton, "Die exegetische Arbeit des jungen Melanchthon 1518/19 bis 1528/29," Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, LIV, (Heft 1, 1963), 57.

by a very short time during Philip's childhood, seem to have been disturbing to him, but not traumatic. There was no family influence like that of the ebullient and dominating, very-much-alive Hans Luther on the sensitive Martin. Perhaps because of this, no Erik Erikson has attempted to plumb Master Philip's Freudian depths. Nevertheless, there was a man there of passion, if not of passions, of strength, if not of raw power, of genuine warmth without the affability of Luther. It is a tribute to the stature of the younger man that he could perceive the contrasting qualities in his leader, appreciate their potential, but not indulge himself in undue envy or self-deprecation.

We have often heard the dramatic tradition of Luther's discovery of the Bible, chained to its lectern. Manschreck's account of young Melanchthon and his Bible is less dramatic, but highly revealing of the serious concerns of this classics scholar long before his contact with Wittenberg and Luther. While Melanchthon was studying at Tübingen his great-uncle John Reuchlin came often to visit him. This happened:

> A gift from Reuchlin at this time was cherished by Melanchthon the rest of his life--a Latin Bible. During church services when the priest was discoursing, or piously relating a fable about some saint or telling how the wooden soles of the Dominicans' sandals came from the tree of knowledge, Melanchthon would be reading

> Scripture. More than once he was reprimanded for reading his Bible in church![1]

So much stress has been laid on the humanist forces brought to bear in the shaping of Melanchthon's thinking that there is little awareness of his receptivity to other strains of later medieval culture. Thus, Melanchthon had studied the pre-Lutheran reformer John Wessel, before he met Luther. Of those writings, critical of the papal, institutional church and eager for a restoration of the pristine apostolic church, Melanchthon's judgment was that they were very good, and in that judgment Luther later was to concur heartily.[2] Again, there is no general recognition of any influence of the mystics on Master Philip. Robert Stupperich comments that "on the way which he traveled, he did not come into contact with this world of spiritualization and inwardness."[3] Yet, in his funeral oration for Luther, Melanchthon made this astounding appraisal of mysticism by incorporating two of its luminaries among the great successors of the apostles:

> After the apostles comes a long line, inferior, indeed, but distinguished by the divine attestations: Polycarp, Irenaeus, Gregory of Neocaesarea, Basil, Augustine, Prosper, Maximus, Hugo, Bernard, Tauler and others.[4]

---

[1]Manschreck, Melanchthon, 39.

[2]Manschreck, Melanchthon, 38.

[3]Stupperich, Melanchthon, 13.

[4]Melanchthon, "Funeral Oration over Luther," The Protestant Reformation, ed. Lewis W. Spitz (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 70.

## Personal Piety

We may gather documentation to describe quite specifically the healthy personal piety of Melanchthon. It was Christocentric: "This province of debate was first undertaken for no other reason than that it might be made known openly what a great difference there is between the old theology, that of Christ, and the new Aristotelian doctrine."[1] In near-mystical terms he describes the relationship:

> For the Spirit loves his moments of repose in which he penetrates our hearts and takes possession of us in a manner most eager, not for glory, but for ascertaining the truth. That spouse, beloved of Christ, does not stand forth in the doorway, but leads her spouse into the house of her mother. Neither do any rays of celestial wisdom shine forth through us unless beforehand we have been purified by the cross and are "dead to the basic elements of the world."[2]

Again, and very, very piously put: "I shall show just what we who have been washed in the blood of Christ actually owe to Paul."[3] In a similar vein: "To know Christ consists not only in possessing a knowledge of his mighty acts but in embracing his grace with a thankful mind."[4]

In the baccalaureate theses which Melanchthon defended in

---

[1]Philip Melanchthon, Selected Writings, ed. Elmer Ellsworth Glack and Lowell J. Satre (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), p. 22.

[2]Melanchthon, Writings, 24.

[3]Melanchthon, Writings, 34.

[4]Melanchthon, Writings, 35.

September, 1519, we observe very Luther-an notes in such statements as these:

> 6. The law, therefore, causes us even to hate God.
> 9. Therefore the gracious act of Christ is righteousness.
> 12. The intellect can give assent to no given proposition without reason or experience.[1]

Melanchthon was called on to resolve the difficulty of the relatedness of mind or reason and faith. His reflections on this problem are a major theme throughout his works. In the sad hour following Luther's death he could appraise the contribution of that great figure to this recurring problem, and attest his own acceptance:

> He also showed what the true worship of God is: and /he/ recalled the church from /the/ heathenish superstition which imagined that God is worshipped, even though the mind, agitated by some academic doubt, turns away from God. He bade us worship in faith and with a good conscience, and led us to the one Mediator, the Son of God.[2]

In this case, Melanchthon made a quite personal statement as to what his commitment to Christ had involved for him:

> In my case, to be sure, after I surrendered my mind to him to be shaped, I know full well what he has done. And would that all would prefer to try this out for themselves rather than put confidence merely in my words.... For Christian doctrine alone is efficacious for inciting and inspiring our hearts, a thing which the apostles confessed when they called the philosophy of Christ the

---

[1]Melanchthon, Writings, 17.

[2]Spitz, The Protestant Reformation, 71.

word of eternal life; Christ alone is the life and the truth and the light and the way.[1]

Shortly before he died, the man who had given up so much of earthly comforts and rewards to stay with the evangelical cause in Wittenberg wrote these simple words of hope, stating why he was not afraid to die:

You will be redeemed from sin,
And set free from cares and from the fury of theologians.
You come to the light, you will look upon God and his Son,
You will understand the wonderful mysteries
Which you could not comprehend in this life:
Why we were so made, and not otherwise,
And in what the union of the two natures in Christ consists.[2]

With Melanchthon, as with Luther, personal religious experience was extended into the entirety of his Biblical exegesis and his theology. Peter Fraenkel points out how Melanchthon insisted that the creation was not to be seen in itself, but must be seen "pro me."[3] The Scripture was to be read for its message of justification.[4] Melanchthon reproduced Luther's sense of the living word, from God Himself:

Porro necessaria causa est, cur officii mentionem faciat, ut ecclesia sciat doctrinae Pauli credendum esse tamquam voci Dei de caelo sonanti, sicut Moses

---

[1]Melanchthon, Writings, 38.

[2]Stupperich, Melanchthon, 148.

[3]Peter Fraenkel, "Revelation and Tradition," Studia Theologica, XIII (No. 2, 1959), 130. Fraenkel's primary sources are W. A. 5, 25, and C. R. 13, 71ff.

[4]C. R. 1, 638.

> allegat auctoritatem Dei: "Locutus est dominus Deus cunctos sermones hos etc."[1]

Professor Fraenkel has made a weighty point of the way in which Melanchthon stressed this dynamic element in his exposition:

> What is true of "ministerium" is largely true of "doctrina." This term, too, has as it were a tendency to become a verbal noun....Even where doctrina means doctrinal subject matter, Melanchthon frequently couples it with verbs, verbal nouns or other nouns to show the subject matter "at work."[2]

When we combine this stylistic subtlety with the open mention of the Word as the act of God we are strongly impressed with the close relationship of the views of our two reformers. To highlight this awareness Fraenkel set this thesis for the monograph from which we have quoted:

> It will be our contention here that for Melanchthon the propositional form of the Gospel is the manifestation of those very things that modern historians have not been able to find there: the Gospel's more than rational, active character, its mediation of grace and power of conversion, the self-revelation and saving presence of God.[3]

If we are willing to accept Ernst Bizer's conclusion that Melanchthon had arrived at a Lutheran understanding of the promise of the gospel

---

[1]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 57, cf. IV23, 196, 337.

[2]Fraenkel, Studia Theologica, XIII, No. 2, 116-17.

[3]Fraenkel, Studia Theologica, XIII, No. 2, 100.

toward the end of the Matthew Commentary[1] we must recognize the commentary on Romans, the first Loci Communes and the subsequent works of Melanchthon to be outgrowths of this evangelical understanding.

## Clarification Through Strife I

As we have noted, historians have been unduly vague as to the personal element in Melanchthon's religious outlook. However, they have compensated by a quite precise judgment that Melanchthon was an over-zealous traditionalist, concerned over preserving the traditions of the fathers, and equally concerned that the Reformation theology be perpetuated in sharply etched form. In his book, Testimonia Patrum, Peter Fraenkel has given a more positive cast and a more critical stance to Melanchthon's use of the fathers.[2] In our present venture we are especially impressed with the unique role which Augustine played in Melanchthon's theological studies. Master Philip had taste preferences different from Luther's in his selections from the wealth of the Augustine corpus, and he may in some cases have been unwisely impressed by certain elements in that earlier theology. Henning

---

[1]Ernst Bizer, Theologie der Verheissung, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1964), p. 287.

[2]Peter Fraenkel, Testimonia Patrum, The Function of the Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon (Geneve: Gregory Lounz, 1961).

Lindström is convinced that some of the dubious psychological conclusions drawn by Melanchthon "did not happen without the influence of Augustine."[1]

From our studies we are convinced that the typically negative critique of Franz Hildebrandt is improperly drawn: "A man of Melanchthon's calibre, just because he has no speculative talent and no genius of originality, must show himself particularly anxious about the 'recte tradere'."[2] On the contrary we say that Melanchthon chose not the tradition as such, but the faithfulness to the gospel as the criterion:

> Haec persuasio occupavit etiam magnam partem ecclesiae, postquam evangelium non est pure traditum. Porro plena impietatis sunt doctrina, cultus et invocatio apud dubitatores istos. Ac profecto quantum habeat mali illa dubitationis doctrina, peritae et piae mentes iudicare possunt.[3]

Melanchthon accepted the controversial and unpopular consequences of this insight, as recorded in the Annales Vitae:

> Ioanni Hesso scribit et reprobat transsubstantiationem, distinguit inter theologiam biblicam et scholasticam, defendit suam docendi rationem ad adversariis notatam, et contendit, scripturam sacram solam condere articulos fidei, eam Conciliis esse superiorem, neque contra eam audiendam esse Pontificem Romanum, neque audiendam

---

[1]Henning Lindström, Skapelse och Frälsning i Melanchthons Teologi (Stockholm, Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelses Bok Forlag, 1944), p. 161.

[2]Franz Hildebrandt, Melanchthon, Alien or Ally (Cambridge: The University Press, 1946), pp. 10-11.

[3]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 36.

traditionem ecclesiasticam.[1]

The onus for the corruption of doctrine falls directly on the scholastics, who distort to absurdity:

> Ergo omnino repudianda est interpretatio scholasticorum, quia detrahit iustificationem fidei et transfert in dilectionem et iustificationem reddit incertam, quia addit fidei conditionem nostrae dilectionis. Et vide, quam sit absurda interpretatio![2]

Philosophy deceives, and corrupts evangelical doctrine:

> Et admiscuerunt doctrinae Christianae philosophiam, qui rationi tribuerunt vim efficiendae in nobis fidei erga Deum sine Spiritu Sancto. Et quidam scripsit fundamenta doctrinae Christianae Platonicam philosophiam esse. Sic pro certis affirmare, immo quae prorsus sunt extra iudicium rationis aut philosophiae posita, ea est inanis deceptio. Et sicut in lege praeceptum est, ne quis dissimile semen serat in eodem agro, cavendum est, ne commisceantur evangelii doctrina et philosophia; sed evangelium est doctrina vitae spiritualis et iustificationis coram Deo.[3]

Against such a philosophical-intellectual knowledge Melanchthon argues for the function of faith. The apostle Paul, he contends

> rightly accomodates the statement of faith, and witnesses that he understands by faith not only a historical knowledge, but a trust by which we firmly believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. Nor, indeed, can anyone who does not thus understand the word "faith" follow the reasoning of Paul...Right now this darkness is to our adversaries a special impediment to their accepting the doctrine of faith, because they do not rightly understand the word "faith."[4]

---

[1]C. R. 1, cl. Annales Vitae Mel.

[2]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 99.

[3]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 241.

[4]Melanchthon, Writings, 166, cf. Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 381.

The cherished method of allegorizing then fell under Melanchthon's rigorous criticism. The method is both profitless and improper to the simple understanding of Scripture:

> De scholasticis non est, ut multis agam, quibus divinae literae, quidvis sunt potius quam simplices, immo nescio quem Proteum fingunt, dum eas in allegoricos, tropologicos, anagogicos, literales, grammaticales, historicos sensus transformant et transfundunt in nescio quas lacunas.[1]
>
> In reference to these, it was not the duty of an ordinary man to trifle about the four senses in almost every individual syllable. Nor has it shamed bold men to play games in so serious a matter and in them to vie in various opinions when no such thing ought to have been done, except when something that was both sure and very simple according to the figures of grammarians and rhetoricians should have been brought forth, as Erasmus advises in his method. Or, as the Greeks say, one thing should have been compared with another. For Scripture has not been produced in order that it may not be understood. Rather, the merciful Spirit of God, who is light, did this that it might be understood in common by all the pious. Let praise depart, if any praise there be, from the philosophers of obscurity, the Spirit of God arrogates this praise to himself, in that he equally well both instructs the tender and unpolished and gives each of the most brilliant a workout. Saint Augustine, a man of both singular genius and great experience in sacred matters, said that the apostle does not desire a man of acute understanding, but only an attentive hearer.[2]

Melanchthon, like Luther, tolerates the judicious use of allegory, as his theoretical statements and his occasional practice indicate, but he is rigid in his qualifications:

> In passages of this type it is necessary to allegorize, but one must do so with prudence. For as touches allegories even great authors often talk with more than

---

[1]Melanchthon, S. A., I, 19, cf. IV, 307.

[2]Melanchthon, Writings, 43.

> puerile non-sense. Nor do they admit of the allegorical interpretation except that the rites and duties were handed down in this respect, that they were to be signs of other things; that the sacrifices of the Levitical high priest have been handed down in this respect to typify the sacrifice of Christ.
>
> Unless an individual is thoroughly conversant with the whole of Scripture he will unsuccessfully treat of allegories. But moreover the Spirit will easily judge, nay more, common sense will tell you how far and to what degree, the use of allegories is permissible. However they lead to an understanding of the power of the law and the gospel, provided they are fitly used.[1]

## Clarification Through Strife II

Melanchthon's favorable comment on the method of Erasmus in a previous citation is the kind of relation we would expect from him in view of his notable humanist training and apparent leanings. Although the breach between the two men was not as notorious as that between Luther and Erasmus we must realize that Philip's simple presence and association throughout his career with the Wittenbergers separated him effectively from both Reuchlin and Erasmus. The tempered expression of his differences with the leading humanists of this time may be attributed to Melanchthon's temperament, it may well be also that in his own acknowledged competence in the liberal arts he was not troubled by the least sense of inferiority. To say that Erasmus sought to be a Christian humanist while Melanchthon considered himself a

---

[1]Philip Melanchthon, The Loci Communes of Philip Melanchthon, trans. Charles Leander Hill (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1944), pp. 129-30.

humanist Christian may suggest the basic difference between the two. We contend that there was a deep, substantial difference, clearly revealed in Melanchthon's writings, a difference which parallels that which we marked in the earlier comparison of Erasmus and Luther. Thus, although the precise mode of expression may be quite different, we would disagree entirely with the too-typical, too-trite statement of Erwin L. Lueker:

> Melanchthon's rationalism shows itself in rational proofs for the Scriptures, proofs for God, the combination of logical, impersonal, and living Biblical characteristics in his God thoughts. It is interesting to note that while Luther often found paradoxes in the Scriptures and problems which he admittedly could not solve, such admissions, at least as far as I have been able to ascertain, are rare in Melanchthon. Yet Melanchthon did not intend to place reason above revelation, but he thought of taking reason into the service of revelation.[1]

Over against the Erasmian picture Melanchthon argues that the Scriptures are clear and understandable. This he states in defending Luther against the Paris theologians:

> If you will deny that the meaning of Scripture by itself is certain without glosses, I do not see why it was necessary that Scripture be produced if the Holy Spirit was unwilling to establish with certainty what he wants us to think. Or why do the apostles invite us at all to the study of Scripture, if its meaning is uncertain?...Therefore, you will grant me that the meaning of Scripture is certain and clear, so that if any passage anywhere is rather obscure, Scripture itself explains itself.[2]

---

[1]Erwin L. Lueker, "Luther and Melanchthon," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXI, (August, 1960), 478.

[2]Melanchthon, Writings, 73.

History has shown that men do not accept such a clear sense, but rather Melanchthon "saw that the authority of Scripture was being everywhere diminished by human decrees. Not only were things human compared with the divine but even seemed to be preferred."[1] Melanchthon asserts flatly what we are today probing as a very sophisticated problem, the nature of human language itself. To him, this is further proof that man could get the message:

> For since God wills to reveal himself and his purposes in the language of prophets and apostles, it is not to be imagined that that language is as ambiguous as the leaves of the Sibyl, which, when disturbed, fly away, the sport of the winds.[2]

Nevertheless, such clarity does not rule out the mystery and the hiddenness. In an unusually long set of notes on I. Cor. 13:12, we find some of the most incisive treatment of this problem by Melanchthon. These are some of the key affirmations:

> Sunt speculum et aenigma. Speculum est cognitio, aenigma est forma Dei obscura, qua cognoscitur. Speculum seu cognitio est fides non illa sophistica, sed ea, quae in corde est, verax, quae glorificat Deum, hoc est: timet, et in fiducia misericordiae seu gratiae Dei gubernat nos.... Quod dicit: "in aenigmate," designat illius fidei verbum, illius cognitionis formam, qua cognoscitur Deus, sed obscurum verbum est; voco verbum fidei et Dei id, quod efficax est spiritu Dei in cordibus nostris....Adhuc formae illae Dei sunt obscurae, quia non comprehenduntur totae.[3]

---

[1]Melanchthon, Writings, 48.

[2]Spitz, The Protestant Reformation, 72.

[3]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 73.

The word "hidden" may be ambiguous by itself in Melanchthon's statement that "This Son of God announced the hidden wonderful news of Incarnation, redemption, grace and salvation for man first to Adam and Eve."[1] What follows however, is a lengthy statement on Christ's relation to the external, or preached Word, where we would have to utilize the whole concept of hiddenness, in view of Luther's emphasis. Employing the prerogative of his familiarity and his own great love for his spiritual leader, Melanchthon could say in his parting words over Luther that God had worked in a strange way through this man. "Over against these enemies God set this mighty destroyer. In vain do they find fault with God. Moreover, God does not govern the church by human counsels; nor does he choose instruments very like those of men."[2] God's hidden work, the opposite, is stated more formally by Melanchthon, but the life by death motif is still there: "How much more truly does Paul teach that human souls are terrified and slain by the law, but made alive by the Spirit of Christ."[3]

Now such questions are very difficult for man to deal with, and how shall he confront them?

> Quamquam autem multae quaestiones adhuc haerent in hoc negotio, tamen, ut dixi, fas sit aliqua nescire homines, et profecto modus ac finis aliquis

---

[1]Melanchthon, Christian Doctrine, 14; cf. Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 204.

[2]Spitz, The Protestant Reformation, 72. Cf. Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 224-25.

[3]Melanchthon, Writings, 40.

> disputationum esse debet. Et multo satius est exerceri animos timore et fide quam speculationibus sapientiae Dei, cum ideo Christus nobis propositus sit, ut peccata nostra et ipsius misericordiam consideremus nec scrutemur alia.[1]

In a similar vein a little farther on, Melanchthon said:

> Vide autem, quomodo revocat eos ad promissionem! Iubet hanc apprehendere; non iubet arcanum consilium praedestinationis inquirere. Ita praemunit lectorem propositā promissione, antequam accedit ad disputationem de electione.[2]

It is proper to respond in adoration rather than by understanding, since some of the profound teachings resist human grasp: "Adorari et credi volunt sublimia de trinitate, de providentia, de incarnatione verbi mysteria, rationibus humanis penetrari non volunt."[3] It is noteworthy that Melanchthon opened his Loci Communes, that work so often reviled as a rationalizing statement, with the same caveat. In the Introduction to the 1521 edition we have the admonition: "Mysteria divinitatis rectius adoraverimus quam vestigaverimus."[4] The 1555 edition has no change in tone:

> For those who fear God, this reminder should be enough. We are to consider this truly wondrous mystery with humble hearts and pray that God himself will teach and enlighten us. We are not to waste time with inpertinent

---

[1] Melanchthon, S. A., V, 258.

[2] Melanchthon, S. A., V, 259.

[3] C. R. 1, 313; Cf. Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 408, 444.

[4] Melanchthon, S. A., II/1, 6.

questions, as unfortunately, we have done too often.[1]

## Clarification Through Strife III

Melanchthon was not so furiously involved with the Schwärmer as was Luther, but he had strong opinions in the matter and expressed them bluntly. According to Stupperich, Melanchthon revealed in his popular History of Thomas Müntzer that

> his own conviction remained firm: everything that bore the semblance of spiritualism he bluntly rejected. The judgment that he had formed of the Zwickauers and fanatics he later carried over into his views of the Baptists.[2]

One of the primary charges against them was the same as that against scholastics and humanists, that is, that they depended too much on reason. The mysteries of God, Melanchthon charged against Zwingli, were made subject to reason.[3] In his tract, Against the Anabaptists, Melanchthon asserted that they preferred their poor reasoning to the Scripture: "Not often do they cite the Scriptures, but for the most part rely upon reasoning, and this reasoning is indeed quite inconsistent."[4] This amounts to a contempt of the Word and its ministry.

---

[1]Melanchthon, Christian Doctrine, 36.

[2]Stupperich, Melanchthon, 58-59.

[3]C. R. 23, 749. Cited by Peter Fraenkel, Studia Theologica, XIII, No. 2, 102.

[4]Melanchthon, Writings, 103.

> Nos autem sciamus hos "pedes" amandos esse et apud nuntios evangelii consolationem et vitam quaerendam esse. Et quia his traditur ordo, quomodo fides concipiatur, habemus testimonium adversus fanaticos spiritus, qui contempto ministerio verbo volunt sanctificari per alias quasdam illuminationes.[1]

Melanchthon stood firm on his asseveration that the Holy Spirit worked through the Word, and not apart from it.[2] He was not impressed with the fanatics' claim, their dream, as he put it, that the Spirit was given without the Word.[3] He charged that this was subjectivism, "confidence in one's innate ability"[4] and that the "enthusiasm of the Zwickau men rested on self-stimulation and self-deception."[5] Such attitudes should not be regarded as holy acts, but rather as breaches of the first commandment in self-love.[6]

The spirituals were noted for their claim to superior and sovereign experiences, but Master Philip contends that these were not deep enough to be weighty considerations, for "they do not yet know how hard it is to stand before God without God's Word."[7] This

---

[1]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 275, cf. V, 65.

[2]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 273.

[3]C. R., 15, 478; cf. Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 255.

[4]Melanchthon, Writings, 128.

[5]Stupperich, Melanchthon, 56.

[6]Stupperich, Melanchthon, 60.

[7]Luther, Correspondence, II, 477.

argument is adduced against Oecolampadius on the Sacrament:

> But these absurd arguments will be less offensive to him who remembers that a judgment about heavenly things must be made in accordance with the Word of God, and not geometry, and who has learned through being tempted that there is no reasoning which can instruct a conscience satisfactorily when it has abandoned the Word of God.[1]

Although Melanchthon does not so commonly use the term Anfechtung as does Luther, his writings are simply dotted with reference to the concept, as may be noted in the preceding citation. Knowledge of God, he maintains, is not to be otiosa cogitatio, but that developed out of all the terrors of Anfechtung. Thus:

> Interea his ipse motus fidei in animis nostris, non est otiosa cogitatio, sed luctatur cum terroribus peccati, cum morte, dimicat cum diabolo, qui horribilibus modis oppugnat infirmas mentes, ut vel ad contemptum Dei, vel ad desperationem eas impellat.[2]

Melanchthon views afflictions as veritably programmatic to knowledge, as we gather from this type of statement: "They are afflicted in various ways so that by prayer their faith, their knowledge of God, and their spiritual newness may increase."[3] Even the term Sacrament may be applied to the experience, by this reasoning: "Affliction is a sacrament, for it is a thing to which God has joined the Word by which he promises

---

[1]Melanchthon, Writings, 127.

[2]C. R. 15, 515.

[3]Melanchthon, Writings, 173; cf. Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 69.

his grace."[1]

Melanchthon's view of Anfechtung incorporates the life from death theme we observed above. Note here:

> Et "mortificatio" intelligi debet de seriis terroribus et doloribus, videlicet de vera poenitentia et de veris afflictionibus.[2]

> Sed hi terrores opprimerent atque occiderent nos, nisi sustentarentur atque erigerentur animi promissione Christi. Ita Paulus proprie appellat mortificationem terrores, qui mortem afferunt, nisi evangelio erigatur animus.[3]

Stupperich calls attention to a touching personal response in the latter years of life of the great Master. In contemplating the domestic sorrow over the death of his daughter Anna, he considered how, in Stupperich's words:

> Misfortune never happens by chance, but is God's will. If man is visited by misfortune, God does not mean to destroy him but to call him to repentance and faith. Therefore, faith takes refuge in God and says with Job: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."[4]

In a formal, systematic way as well, as in the 1555 Loci, Melanchthon urged bearing tribulation unto repentance and the exercise of faith.[5]

One of the areas of God's testing is that of vocation.

---

[1]Melanchthon, Writings, 105.

[2]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 235.

[3]Melanchthon, S. A., V., 202.

[4]Stupperich, Melanchthon, 123.

[5]Melanchthon, Christian Doctrine, 286-295.

To vocation pertain many of the typical characteristics of Anfechtung: harshness, uncertainty, the necessity of faith and the possibility of growth. Here are some examples of Master Philip's comments:

> Nos sciamus hunc arcanum cultum Dei longe praestantiorem esse, sc. fiduciam misericordiae in vocatione et in tentationibus omnis generis. Hunc cultum exercere christiani praecipue debent; ita enim crescat in eis notitia Dei.[1]

> I have been brought to Saxony. Here I will do my duty until the Holy Spirit to whom I shall commit myself shall call me away. I have such a love for my native land as the gods might envy; but in all things I must consider the call of Christ, rather than my own inclination.[2]

There were other difficulties for Melanchthon than the physical separation from his homeland. Apparently he declined a doctorate because of his reluctance to accept the deadly responsibility which Luther maintained was the essential nature of the oath to teach the Word in purity against all odds.[3] Ernst Bizer reports a quite credible account of Melanchthon's desire to escape the responsibility of Scriptural exegesis:

> Nach dem Abschluss der Vorlesung über das Johannesevangelium hatte Melanchthon den Wunsch, die theologischen Vorlesungen einzustellen; er sei ihnen nicht gewachsen und komme sich dabei vor wie ein Esel in den Mysterien, es gebe genug theologische Lektoren in Wittenberg und

---

[1]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 154.

[2]James William Richard, Philip Melanchthon: The Protestant Preceptor of Germany (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1898), p. 67. From C. R. 1, 151.

[3]Richard, Melanchthon, 58.

> er eigne sich besser für den "kindlicheren" griechischen Unterricht.[1]

Luther, as usual, dissuaded him from such a step and persuaded him to continue, consistent with his appraisal that Melanchthon was "called of God" and that he performed "the ministry of the Word."[2]

In more confident hours, his witness to the reality of vocation was incisive: "Sic nos a Deo missi sumus ut Moses et alli prophetae; fidite, nostra praedicatio...Dei voluntas et Dei verbum est, quod nuntiamus."[3] Similarly he could accept for the minister of the Word the promise, "Do verba mea in ore tuo."[4] But this meant, as against the Schwärmer, that Philip was claiming the unique grace of vocation and further insisting that the spirituals wrongly denied the efficacy of a human ministry.[5] This, moreover, is to reaffirm the concretness of God's working through men in history. Fraenkel makes a seminal and provocative comment on such an interpretation of the office:

> But most frequently of all "ministerium" is quite clearly an activity, function or process. Sometimes it is quite generally the process by which God reveals Himself and gives His grace to us by external means. More often it is the activity of Gospel preaching and teaching, either specifically or as a paradigm for the whole of

---

[1]Bizer, Theologie der Verheissung, 288.

[2]Luther, Correspondence, I, 58.

[3]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 103.

[4]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 100.

[5]Fraenkel, Studia Theologica, XIII, No. 2, 114-15, n. 4.

grace-giving:...ministerium ipsum, hoc est munus docendi.[1]

## Summary and Prospect

We have now surveyed in our last two chapters three major areas of polemical confrontation involving hermeneutical perspectives. We have shown how the scholastic, ontological presupposition tended toward the use of allegory and how this was answered by both reformers through an emphasis on the dynamic character of the Scripture. Since the Scripture was the living Word of the living and working God it could not properly be treated simply as a source of confirmation of the ontology derived from philosophy nor could it be the support of a tradition accepted as authoritative by the church. This view of the Scripture, developed hermeneutically meant a new emphasis on the historical or literal meaning of the text.

The second confrontation, presented through the offices of the humanist Erasmus, represented the problem of a simple, historicist literalism supported by the new technical aids of grammar and philology. We drew the conclusion here, not alone that the reformers incorporated theological insights into their hermeneutics, but also that from their theology of the Deus Absconditus they pointed out that it was invalid to interpret Scripture as if man could comprehend the entire mystery of

---

[1]Fraenkel, Studia Theologica, XIII, No. 2, 114-15.

God within his human speech. This concept of the hidden God set a limit on the attempts at an ultimate rational statement about the will and work of God, and called into use the doctrine of opposites, the paradox, the "strange work" of God. This means the admitting of the ultimate Mystery, Mystery to be worshiped, adored, accepted in His holy Otherness.

The problem of religious, spiritual interpretation was brought into conflict with the reformers by the Schwärmer or spirituals. Their rejection of history was indicated by their minimizing of the function of the Scriptural Word and of the stated ministry. Their claim was for a direct, unmediated experience of the work of God, hence of the truth. The answer of the reformers was to reemphasize the absolute necessity of the given Word of God, in a historical record and in a historical ministry. Whereas the spirituals insisted on the primacy of their religious experience, the reformers insisted on the ambiguity of experience per se, and brought to bear the concept of Anfechtung. In the ambiguous experiences of the religious life it must be conceded that God again works in His own way, bringing life out of our death, and that only by the reassurance of the living Word of God is man able to tolerate the vicissitudes not only of life in the world, but the temptations of the devout life as well.

As we have indicated, largely allusively, in the selective history of hermeneutics, we have been concerned about the play of the idea of history in the working out of hermeneutical theory and practice.

These allusions have been developed into more specific principles through our study of the polemical dialogues. In the nature of the analyses, the problem has been developed mainly along negative lines, by showing the rejection of untenable positions and the correction by new and inescapable facts. We must proceed to a more positive explication of the involvement in our basic question of the problem of history and of the historical interpretation of the Scripture.

One more significant conclusion should be reviewed. At this point in what is to some degree a comparative study of Luther and Melanchthon, we found no significant differences in their basic understandings of the questions so far posed, or in their basic answers to those questions. What may be more important, the diversity in their style of statement appears to be little more than a merely verbal, formal difference. One possible implication is that each of the two reformers, starting with the same central convictions, operated on the basis of those accepted conclusions, freely and committedly, as an individual, and not as an imitator. The next major division of our study will inquire more precisely into the plausibility of these preliminary conclusions.

# CHAPTER V

## THE SUBJECTIVE ELEMENT--CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT
## THE HEURISTIC PARADIGM

### Thesis

In order to establish a structure for the remaining statement and defence of our hypotheses, we shall set forth this thesis:

The subjective element of hermeneutics for Luther and Melanchthon consists in this: that the saving work of God, graciously applied to the interpreter in the midst of human history, is accepted as the heuristic paradigm for the understanding of God's living Word to man. It is important that this saving work is seen as bringing man into the new life of faith and hope, that this work has already established a new reality together with openness to the ultimate fulfilment of the work and will of God.

We are now involved in our own species of hermeneutical circle. It is evident that the preceding thesis is more than a congeries of parts negative and positive, and yet it can be appraised only in view of the disparate parts. We must now proceed to the parts, having by so much intimated the projected wholeness as to give a preliminary position for a critical review.

## The Use of History

The term "history," is highly ambiguous in itself and requires clarification. Historical interpretation of Scripture has come to mean many things, including quite opposite attitudes and practices of interpretation. Karl Barth removed much of that vagueness as concerned understanding the reformers by declaring:

> The encounters between God and man in the sphere of that secondary objectivity of God mean singly and in the aggregate the taking place of a history (Calvin: a negotium) between God and man. This history begins with a voluntary decision of God and continues in a corresponding voluntary decision of man....The will of God offers itself as good will towards men and is met by faith.[1]

Professor Torrance corroborates the appropriateness of this evaluation in his statement: "The Reformation opened up the historical perspective of understanding and initiated a historical mode of thinking, due as much as anything else to its old Testament studies."[2] A healthier, more concrete perspective on the entire Scripture has to some degree continued in the church by virtue of that same Hebraic influence, as a few random references will indicate. The Danish Luther scholar, H. Østergaard-Nielsen, oriented his study, Scriptura Sacra et Viva Vox, to the concept of the Name of God.

---

[1]Barth, C. D., II/1, 28-29.

[2]Torrance, Theology in Reconstruction, 72.

> Die jüdische Auffassung dagegen ist von dem Wunsch geleitet, zu einer geschichtlichen Weltbetrachtung zu gelangen. Durch das Wort lernt der Jude Gottes Namen kennen und er lernt seinen eigenen Namen kennen, er lernt sich selbst als Jude, als zum erwählten Volk gehörend, kennen. Der Ausgangspunkt der jüdischen Auffassung vom Wort ist das Wort, das von Gott gesprochen wird, der seinen Namen geoffenbart hat und zu seinem eigenen Volk redet.[1]

Østergaard-Nielsen goes on to employ this point as the weapon against a subject-object view in theology, obviously with more recent villains in mind than the scholastics.

In a passage of brilliant linguistic and literary insight, Denis de Rougemont concludes

> No abstractions, for immediate obedience, both "in spirit and in truth," is the worship to be given to the living God. To abstract is, first of all, to remove one's self from the immediate; in a certain sense it is also to doubt. For the Hebrew, then, to be limited to the concrete is to remain faithful to the Law. From the very beginning, even his language is dedicated to this higher calling....Bare of abstract terms, useless for any metaphysics....Among all the songs ever written, only the great prophetic passages have captured the true meaning of the Greek word "poetry"--to make, to act.[2]

In the Scandinavian tradition of Old Testament interpretation, Sigmund Mowinckel agrees,

> The revelation of God is God's own self-giving activity

---

[1]H. Østergaard-Nielsen, Scriptura Sacra et Viva Vox, (München; Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1957), p. 60.

[2]de Rougemont, Christian Opportunity, 60; cf. Rudolf Bultmann, History and Eschatology (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), pp. 118-20.

> and the religious-moral life and the religious-moral insight that is created by it. It unfolds itself through history in the widest sense of this term: that which actually occurs....It is in this drama that God "makes himself known."[1]

Unfortunately, whatever their sources, the historical insights of the Reformation proved virtually impossible to preserve and transmit in their intended form, as Torrance makes clear:

> The Reformation did not have the philosophical or intellectual tools with which to consolidate that insight and elaborate the change in method, and so Protestant theology soon fell back upon the old Aristotelian tools of thought. Consequently the development of historical thinking was severely retarded.[2]

What,exactly, are some of the recurring representative errors in the concept of history which, in turn, deflect the understanding of the Scripture? Gogarten reports, drawing from Dilthey, on the medieval view of history as involved in the plan of God, so that man is seen as a unit passing through the stages of development according to this plan. This idea of wholeness, of universal history, was suited to the metaphysical perspectives of the era, and could readily embrace the church and its traditions as part of this total view.[3] What is noteworthy here is the absence of the contingent, the concretely historical in terms of person or event. It is really an extension of this situation which

---

[1]Sigmund Mowinckel, The Old Testament as Word of God, trans. Reidar B. Bjornard (New York: Abingdon Press, 1959), p. 45.

[2]Torrance, Theology in Reconstruction, 72.

[3]Friedrich Gogarten, Reality of Faith, 20-21.

Croce notes critically with the comment that "it has even been possible to note a pause in historiographical interest, where scholasticism has prevailed."[1]

The late Professor Carl Michalson acutely criticized a subtle but powerful contemporary view, ascribed to Heidegger and Heinrich Ott,

> with their accent on language as the house of being.... Protestant faith is a religion of maturity in which man is oriented toward the world through the mediation of an historically illuminating Word. Ott, with Heidegger, tries to draw his faith back into the days of silent meditation on mysteries deeper than word. [2]

It might be well for the ill-informed quasi-devotees of exotic Oriental religions today to consider Gilbert Chesterton's commentary on some underlying metaphysics of those views as over against Christian understandings. The statement is not too typical of the Roman Catholicism to which Chesterton converted, but an Anglo-Catholic like C. S. Lewis found the book, Everlasting Man, from which our quotation is drawn, making sense out of "the whole Christian outline of history."[3] Chesterton's paragraph reads:

> And there really is this ultimate unmorality behind the metaphysics of Asia. And the reason is that there has been nothing through all these unthinkable ages to bring the human mind sharply to the point; to tell it that the time has come to choose. The mind has lived too much

---

[1]Benedetto Croce, History, Its Theory and Practice (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960), p. 248.

[2]Michalson, Worldly Theology, 111-12.

[3]C. S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy (London: Fontana Books, 1959), p. 178.

> in eternity....It has had too much of eternity, in the sense that it has not had enough of the hour of death and the day of judgment. It is not crucial enough; in the literal sense that it has not had enough of the cross....Europe has not merely gone on growing older. It has been born again.[1]

## History and the Unique

Whatever complex of reasons we may ascribe to the phenomenon we do observe the historical concern of the post-Reformation Western world with the unique, concrete historical event. Walther von Loewenich has even attempted to clear Lessing of the charge against his "particularities of history." In the monograph, Luther und Lessing, von Loewenich suggests that Lessing may not have attempted to militate against all religious conclusions from the one unique event but may have sought to question the regnant "orthodox" positions in order to make way for his own religion of conscience. The citation of Lessing's recognition of Christ as the unique teacher of immortality emphasizes the questionable character of the standard judgment against Lessing on history.[2]

We find further supporting evidence of the historian's concern for the singular in Eiliv Skard's restatement of the position of Heinrich Rickert:

---

[1]G. K. Chesterton, The Everlasting Man, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1926), p. 293; cf. Gabriel Marcel, Homo Viator, trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1951), p. 32.

[2]Walther von Loewenich, Luther und Lessing (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960), pp. 13-14.

> Natural science seeks the universal and the general...it is entirely different with history, which concerns itself precisely with the single person or situation, with the individual and special, with that which the Germans call in an untranslateable word das Einmalige.[1]

## History as Paradigm

But is it legitimate to move from the willingness of some historians to concern themselves with the singular to the thesis that the singular may be designated "paradigmatic" and eventually "heuristically paradigmatic?" The thesis we have advanced at the beginning of this chapter depends on this progression if we are to establish any act of God in history as capable of extension to this decisive role. Two leading American theologians of this mid-twentieth century have affirmed this point as a central expression of their views, not only on the specific question of revelation, but as a focal point in their theology as well.

Professor Carl Michalson's work, The Hinge of History, was one of his most acute contributions to our theological literature before his untimely death. Michalson was thoroughly informed on existentialism, and the position he affirmed in this book indicate that he was led by some existentialist considerations, but that he guarded himself against a non-historical surrender to subjectivism or to the chimera of

---

[1]Eiliv Skard, Mennesket og Historien (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co., 1957), p. 8.

existential choice. Because we find in Michalson some of the key terms in our proposition, and some clearing of irrelevant elemens from our way, we shall quote at some length from two passages of The Hinge of History.

> What happened and is past is nevertheless a kind of history. Historicism is wrong, however, in refusing to concede as a valid dimension of history events impervious to objective methods. For paradigmatic events are intrinsically inaccessible. The events of Biblical history are not the events one knows. They are the events with the help of which one knows. With them he knows, not knowing them, what he would not know without them. This is the reason they are called events of revelation. They occur with apocalyptic suddenness and with a luminousness which leaves the event itself unfathomed while illuminating the whole landscape of life.
>
> Biblical history, then, does not refer to events in general, but to special events. They are not unique in the sense of being isolated events. On the contrary, they are unique in supplying the hinges between events which would otherwise leave our lives in paratactic incompleteness. The Apostle Paul set out to make this clear to the Corinthians who mistook Christ's resurrection for an isolated event. Paul made it clear that this was rather the event by which their own resurrection was to be affirmed. The resurrection had been the very event by which Paul was enabled to see the crucifixion not as a paratactic defeat in history but as a holy victory.[1]
>
> There is no knowledge of God which is not at the same time historical knowledge, that is, knowledge of oneself. Hence the Christian man does not live in time as a sailor in a boat...man lives in time like a fish in water, moment by moment straining out his means of livelihood from that "sea of lost illusions," until he comes upon the Christ who in time is the Lord of time. And in his dying he begins to live again....He hears the story of Jesus Christ and falling to knees he cries, "He saved my life." This is the

---

[1]Michalson, The Hinge of History, 41.

> mood of the Christian apprehension of truth. The Christian does not find a fact in time which hinges together past with future. He is found as one who is hinged pathetically to a past that pulls him down, and who is turned about in an inexplicable metanoia which hinges him anew to a source of hope....When one has met this Christ across the arithmetical expanse of time and felt his life hinged to the author of life, he can know he has come upon "time's other dimension of depth and inwardness," where history has a future.[1]

Although he seems to play the same hazardous game with subjectivity, H. Richard Niebuhr emerges with the same pellucid affirmation of the paradigmatic character of the knowledge of Christ in his influential book, The Meaning of Revelation:

> Revelation means for us that part of our inner history which illuminates the rest of it and which is itself intelligible. Sometimes when we read a difficult book, seeking to follow a complicated argument, we come across a luminous sentence from which we can go forward and backward and so attain some understanding of the whole....The special occasion to which we appeal in the Christian church is called Jesus Christ, in whom we see the righteousness of God, his power and wisdom. But from that special occasion we also derive the concepts which make possible the elucidation of all the events in our history. Revelation means this intelligible event which makes all other events intelligible.[2]

## Temporal Disjunction and Contemporaneity

What is a noteworthy conclusion from the preceding paragraphs

---

[1]Michalson, The Hinge of History, 184-85.

[2]H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 93.

is that the temporal disjunction of past and present is overcome. The problem is not construed as one of becoming contemporaneous with the historical event. This bold thrust would deny even the emphasis on subjectivity, as in Troeltsch's apparently faith-allied emphasis on the subjective factor of personal commitment effecting a union with the essence of the historical events.[1] At another extreme, this view undercuts what Ebeling calls a biblicist view--the type is easily recognizable--which maintains

> that he is doing justice to Scripture if he adapts himself to the period from which it comes, if, for example, he tries to realize early Christianity as a timeless ideal, instead of letting Scripture encounter him where he is really living.[2]

That view may be naive, but even the highly intellectualized, historicist views of history and interpretation toy with the principle of contemporaneity. Thus, for example, Johannes Opp, in his review article on Hans-George Gadamer's book, Wahrheit und Methode, reports Gadamer's challenging of

> the naive presupposition of historicism...that one placed oneself in the spirit of another time, thought in its language and ideas and not in one's own, and thus achieved historical objectivity.[3]

---

[1]Hans W. Frei, "Niebuhr's Theological Background," Faith in Ethics: The Theology of Richard Niebuhr, ed. Paul Ramsey (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 59.

[2]Gerhard Ebeling, The Nature of Faith, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 39.

[3]Johannes Opp, "Truth and Method: A Review Article," Student World, LX, (Fourth Quarter, 1967), 312-13.

Even Sigmund Mowinckel lapses into this jargon when he speaks of becoming "contemporary with the witnesses...so we can share their experiences of God."[1] That it is not the interpreter who becomes contemporary with the witness, but the Witness who is contemporary to the interpreter, is put sharply by Ebeling:

> In diesem Ereignis des glaubenden Verstehens ist, nicht kraft geschickter Auslegungsmethoden, sondern kraft dessen, dass das Zeugnis von Jesus Christus jetzt und hier schöpferisches Wort Gottes selber ist, der Zeitraum der Kirchengeschichte aufgehoben und die Gleichzeitigkeit mit Jesus Christus Wirklichkeit....Die Kirchengeschichte als Geschichte der Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift ist also die Geschichte der Gegenwärtigkeit des unter Pontius Pilatus gekreuzigten und auferstandenen Jesus Christus.[2]

In Adolf Sperl's analysis we find a profound convergence of cultural and theological criticism, which is highly revealing for any continuing appraisal of the problem of contemporaneity, and enlightening specifically in the Reformation situation:

> Diese im Grunde romantische Vorstellung von der Wiederbelebung einer vergangenen Zeit durch Vergegenwärtigung in der Vorstellung dessen, der sich mit der Literatur dieser Zeit beschäftigt, liegt aber dem humanistischen Traditionsverständnis zugrunde. In dem Moment, in dem dieses Verhältnis zur Vergangenheit nicht auf eine mehr oder weniger unverbindliche Romantik beschränkt bleibt, zeigt sich die grundsätzliche Unterschiedenheit von dem reformatorischen Schriftprinzip besonders deutlich. Wenn dieses Traditionsverständnis zu einem Prinzip wird, nach

---

[1]Mowinckel, The Old Testament as Word of God, 130-31.

[2]Gerhard Ebeling, Kirchengeschichte als Geschichte der Auslegung der heiligen Schrift (Tübingen: J. C. B. Johr, 1947), pp. 26-27. Cf. Regin Prenter, The Word and the Spirit, trans. Harris E. Kaasa (Minneapolis; Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), p. 132.

> dem gegenwärtige Verhältnisse gestaltet werden sollen, wird es gesetzlich und vermag höchstens zu einer anachronistischen Reprist[illegible]ination auf den verschiedene Lebensgebieten führen, weil der Mensch etwass Unmögliches versucht: Er will durch seine Aktivität die Vergangenheit zu neuem Leben erwecken.[1]

Let us accept the temper of these strictures against the evasion of history by an attempt to contemporize the past. Assuredly, our two reformers would not have looked with good will on any enterprise that assumed such god-like capacities in man or which demanded of man the impossible work before he might receive the necessary revelation. This returns us to the prior statements on the paradigmatic and the heuristic, and demands attention to the question of the appropriateness of these designations and their hermeneutical consequences to a descriptive analysis of the subjective element in the hermeneutics of Luther and Melanchthon.

## God Gives Man History

In order to make a closer comparison possible of the positions of Luther and Melanchthon in this section we shall consider both of them in a step by step progression, rather than attempting to cover the total Luther material first, as we did in the polemical section. We have described the theology of the two Wittenberg reformers previously as Christocentric, evangelical, emphasizing the act of God in Christ for

---

[1]Sperl, Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation, 70.

man. This is the basic paradigm. If, however, it is subjectively paradigmatic as a private experience of salvation, as is so often alleged against Luther, its interpetive function would be not only questionable but improper. If we maintain a subjective element which is not subjectivity, what, then, have the reformers made of the paradigm of grace and Christ?

For Luther it was always "was Christum treibt" that was central in the entire Scripture. He used the geometric image in saying "Christ is the center from which the circle is drawn."[1] Against opponents he would say:

> These texts give us a faithful portrayal of Christ, of His person and of His work. I rub this text under the noses of the hypocrites and the work-righteous when they attempt to teach me something apart from this light; and I refuse to believe them even if St. John the Baptist himself were their spokesman.[2]

Christ's work is the forgiveness of sins, that is the "summa doctrinae."[3] This total work of Christ, whether we call it forgivenss, life, salvation, faith is always to be taught so that it is clear "that the knowledge of Christ and of faith is no work of man, but simply the gift of God, who as he createth faith, so doth he keep it in us."[4]

---

[1]Erlangen, 46, 386. Quoted in Grant, Bible in the Church, 111. Cf. W. A., D. B. 7, 384; Luther, Lenker X, 150-53.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed., XXII, 71-72.

[3]W. A., 20, 654; cf. Am. Ed., Companion Volume, 181-82.

[4]Luther, Galatians, 76.

Melanchthon was no less precise in his Christocentricity:

> Quia Christum cognoscimus, cognoscimus voluntatem patris in Christo, cognoscentes voluntatem patris spiritualiter de operibus Dei, tum in nobis, tum extra nos, iudicare possumus.[1]

Like Luther, Melanchthon saw the Old Testament also oriented to the gospel, as Sperl has pointed out in connection with the exposition of Proverbs.[2] He combined a strong emphasis on the "misericordia" of God with the centrality of the forgiveness of sins.[3] Stupperich summarizes the application of these ideas by Master Philip:

> Why does one read the Scripture, he asks, if not to comprehend the meaning of justification? Of what use is it to know that God is merciful if one's own heart is not touched by the realization "that he is merciful to you?" To have this experience is "to know God truly."[4]

Melanchthon's emphasis on the "for you" of the work of justification is not only sharply Lutheran, but suggestive as well of the personal element in the recognition of the salvation as paradigm. One consistent element in the too frequently slipshod definitions of faith is at least "the readiness to know that I am meant." Emil Brunner has warned that we ought not to misconstrue faith as mystic experience of oneness, or primitive religion's encounter with the numinous, or

---

[1] Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 28; cf. IV, 24.

[2] Adolf Sperl, Melanchthon als Ausleger des Alten Testaments (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1959), p. 19. Cf. Melanchthon, S. A., V, 228.

[3] Melanchthon, S. A., V, 135.

[4] Stupperich, Melanchthon, 46. Cf. C. R. 13, 1466.

speculative religion's philosophical knowledge as surrogate for Biblical faith.[1] The strictures of both reformers, earlier in this paper set forth, against religious experience as such, or mysticism or scholastic speculation, indicate the appropriateness of Brunner's warning at this point. Let us suggest briefly here that the operative, permissible factors remaining for the definition of faith understood in the reformation sense were trust in Christ and commitment.

## Faith as Heuristic

The apprehension is by faith, not by understanding or the senses, Luther insists:

> Da gehört nu Glaube zu, sonst lesst sichs nicht fassen, und wer nicht gleuben wil, sondern wils mit seinen fünff sinnen und Vernunfft ausforschen und nicht erst gleuben, denn ers verstehet, der far imer hin, denn diese lere gehet in unsern Kopff nicht, es ist der vernunfft zu hoch, der Glaube fassets allein, so zeugets die Schrifft, wer da nicht gleuben wil, mags lassen.[2]

"Unless you lay hold of this by simple faith, you will never understand anything."[3] "Sine fide ista nemo intelligit....Sed nos dei gratia intelligimus. Habemus enim Euangelium et verum intellectum scripturae."[4] Those who cast away the precious pearl Christ do not

---

[1]Brunner, Faith, Hope and Love, 17.

[2]W. A. 46, 543; cf. Luther, Lenker X, 160, 207, 251, 407.

[3]Luther, Am. Ed., XII, 203.

[4]W. A., 41, 167.

have faith and cannot teach faith.[1] The vision of faith is preferable to actual sight: "Even if I do not see this with my physical eye,...I can still behold it with my spiritual sight of faith. And I prefer this to seeing it physically."[2] All of this is, typically, Luther.

Moreover, Luther maintains, it is clearly all men of faith, i.e., the godly, who have this special understanding: "Moses...purposely intended to show to the spiritually minded,"[3] "to the godly all things which are revealed and handed down to us in the Holy Scriptures are firmly founded and sufficiently clear."[4] When the godly look into the Word they are able to perceive the wiles also of Satan.[5] By contrast, sin, not lack of intellect, prevents us from understanding.[6]

Stated in another way, "the heretics, the Jews, the folk of spiritual pride, and all who are outside God's grace" lack understanding of the deep things of God. "For no one can think rightly about God unless the Spirit of God is in him."[7] He dares to assert that the Spirit came to all the saints.

---

[1]Luther, Galatians, 99.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed., XXII, 203.

[3]Luther, Lenker, I, 49.

[4]Luther, Lenker, I, 61.

[5]Luther, Lenker, I, 291.

[6]W. A., 37, 551.

[7]Luther, Romans, 33-34.

> This same Spirit who was in Isaiah in the midst of his time and tribulation was also in Job, in Abraham, in Adam, and is still in all the members of the whole Body of Christ from the beginning to the end of the world.... Judging not according to the Spirit, but according to works, you look at the surface of the divine writings just as the Jews in the desert stood at their tent doors and saw nothing except the back of Moses entering into the tent of the tabernacle of the Lord.[1]

The Holy Spirit is the schoolmaster who performs "his office of teaching the heart."[2] Such instruction is essential, for

> Maiora nobis data, quam homo concipiat. Quis concipit fideliter se habere vitam aeternam? Vix capimus transitoria, taceo stabilia et aeterna. Nobis donatus spiritus, ut sciamus sc. Nosse, scire, quanta donata, est spiritus sancti opus.[3]

Not only has the Spirit "explained the Scriptures and Christ and made them clear,"[4] He is sent of Christ:

> For Christ says: "He shall teach you and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you:" that is, he will beautifully explain (glorify) what I now say to you, better than I am able to teach with words, so that you will need no further words.[5]

In very similar thoughts, expressed in his own imagery, Melanchthon concurs on the role of faith. "Summa, velamen non tollitur, nisi conversi fuerimus ad Christum, et cum convertimur,

---

[1]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXII, 176.

[2]Luther, Lenker, XII, 320-21.

[3]W. A., 20, 788.

[4]Luther, Lenker, XII, 293.

[5]Luther, Lenker, XII, 284.

renascimur, ut simus idem spiritus cum eo."[1] He is very concerned to correct any false simplistic notions of faith, hence the et...et in the following, and the emphasis on profferred forgiveness in Christ:

> Est /fides/ igitur assensus in intellectu, et velle hanc divinam consolationem, et in ea acquiescere, cum audimus nobis Deum propicium esse propter filium Iesum Christum.[2]

Faith is not to be confused with "historical" knowledge thus defined: "Historica cognitio, qua certo scio, quod Christus est deus et homo etc....Talis historica cognitio de Christo non justificat."[3] And again, "Fides significat fiduciam misericordiae. Nec est tantum notitia historiae, sed proprie significat assentiri promissionibus divinis seu velle et accipere promissam misericoridam."[4] Self-righteousness forcloses understanding: "For the conscience intent on its own merits can not understand the remission of sins, nor true prayer and waiting on divine help, etc."[5]

The doctrine of the Spirit is essential also in Melanchthon's interpretation. Without the Spirit one has only the "littera" of Scripture. "'Littera' est omnis cogitatio et observatio, qua verbum Dei

---

[1]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 108; cf. V, 202.

[2]C. R. 15, 514.

[3]C. R., 20, 706.

[4]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 40; cf. Melanchthon, Writings, 166.

[5]Melanchthon, Writings, 136.

conatur humana ratio per sese facere sine spiritu sancto."[1] Christ's words of warning concerning false teachers are construed thus: "Immo nemo nisi habens spiritum et vivens spiritu potest spiritualia docere."[2] Not only does the believer enjoy privilege over against revelation, he also perceives God's work in the world. Adolf Sperl summarizes:

> Wie aber die Offenbarung Gottes zugleich seine Verhüllung vor dem Fleisch ist, so ist auch die Wirklichkeit der spiritualia in dieser Welt eine verborgene, nur mit geistlichen Augen wahrnehmbare. Es ist die Wirklichkeit des Glaubens, die dem natürlichen Menschen verschlossen bleibt.[3]

In a sharply concrete statement, Melanchthon asserts:

> Spiritus sanctus per evangelium datur, per legem non datur....evangelium non est praedicatio doctrinae alicuius tantum, sed est donatio ipsa Spiritus sancti. Minister sum non litterae, sed Spiritus sancti, id est: non doceo, sed dono Spiritum sanctum.[4]

The tidy play on words "non doceo, sed dono" is pleasant, but the meaning conveyed is unusually revealing. If we take such evidences as this text and the preceding argument seriously, we can hardly conclude with McGiffert that Melanchthon recognized "reason and revelation as co-ordinate sources of theology."[5]

---

[1]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 88-89; cf. IV, 101, V, 167.

[2]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 35.

[3]Sperl, Melanchthon als Ausleger des Alten Testaments, 24.

[4]Melanchthon, S. A. IV, 103.

[5]A. C. McGiffert, Protestant Thought before Kant (New York: Harper & Bros., 1962), p. 76.

## The Proper Heuristic Function

In the elements of gospel, faith and Spirit we have set out facets of the paradigm of the Word of God. As we turn to the problems of the heuristic function, we must clarify our intentions in using the word, admitting that a purely philosophical definition would convey a false impression of our meaning in this total context. We accept the proposition that the heuristic aids in the discovery of truth. But that is not to say that a result or corollary is the attainment of knowledge as such. Unfortunately, the idea of "Scriptura Scripturae interpres" has been understood to mean something like that, so that clear passages will illumine obscure passages and gradually more complete knowledge will result. The idea that Scripture study develops greater certainty, greater assurance of the ultimate rightness of the assertions seems to us to be of the same order of reasoning from the same starting-point. Another fallacy has been the hoped-for achievement of an enlarged authority principle. A last extension of these modes of thinking would contend first that the Scripture convinces man of absolute moral demands and then effectively coerces him to conform to those standards.

Now if we accept thetically a norm like Professor Torrance's "from the historical involvement of Christian Truth, which only can be known and communicated in a way corresponding to its nature as

historical and spiritual Truth"[1] we shall begin more correctly by asking the question, "what is 'conformity' with this Truth?" Obviously, gospel can not be converted into non-gospel, whether Law or works or condemnation. Even more important, from a methodological point of view, faith can not be made unfaith. That is, faith can not be overcome by a knowledge which no longer requires faith, or certainty which no longer has the unproved and unprovable basis of faith, or authority which is so unquestioned that utter subjugation is demanded, not the humble response of faith. The point of this is, moreover, that we err if we make the misguided attempt to speak of a self-authenticating character in Scripture, or a self-verifying, or, for that matter, an ineluctable authority structure. In an attempt to replace these terms with a more apt and responsive term, we have been immoderately unsuccessful. The term self-edifying has the flaw of a difficult reflexive, although the edificare root commends itself to us as pointing in the proper direction.

A second major problem area in anticipating the development of the heuristic motif is the renewed problem of the personal. The paradigm concerns personal salvation through the gospel, a personal faith, a personal Spirit working in the spirit of man. This means, as Professor Torrance has said in another context:

---

[1]Thomas F. Torrance, The School of Faith (London: James Clarke & Co., Limited, 1959), p. xxix.

> Because God brings man into living and personal communion with him, the place of the human subject in the knowledge of God cannot be excluded from the full content of that knowledge. Our knowing of God is part of our knowledge of God.[1]

Just what we may say about this knowing subject varies according to our theological presupposition. Dietrich Bonhoeffer delineates the relation in sophisticated style with an existentialist flavor:

> In accordance with the being of revelation, the being of man should be conceived neither frozen as entity nor spirited into non-entity. In either of these cases the total existence of man would, in the end, stay unaffected. No; the man we must consider is the historical man who knows himself transplanted from the old into the new humanity and who is, by membership of the new, a person re-created by Christ, a person who "is" only in the act-reference to Christ and whose being "with reference to" Christ is based on being in Christ and his communion in such a way that the act is "suspended" in the being, while the being itself "is" not in the absence of the act.[2]

From H. Richard Niebuhr we glean a similar view of man, couched in another, but familiar, jargon:

> Meeting with such a Thou, the I is changed. The self which is known by another and so knows itself through another's eyes is not an impersonal process of thinking. It is a person with a definite character, just this particular self; it is a self which can no longer retreat infinitely behind its actions but is caught fast and held in the act of the other's knowing of it. The self which is known and so achieves self-knowledge is a committed

---

[1]Thomas F. Torrance, "The Influence of Reformed Theology in the Development of Scientific Method," Dialog, II (Winter, 1963), p. 45.

[2]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Act and Being, trans., Bernard Noble (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 130.

> self--an I which must acknowledge what it is and so accept itself.[1]

It would be anachronistic to impose these types of analyses back into the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, our awareness of the development of this type of appraisal of the nature of the believing person may help to alert us to nuances in the attitudes of the reformers to which we might otherwise be blind.

## Knowing Person as New Man

In Luther's language, the forgiven man is born again, a new man. This is a reality: "Ergo non adumbremur specie sed nascamur Christiani, ut simus iam natura boni, qui antea mali."[2] Professor Wingren has amplified this statement in consonance with Luther's thought to see the new man as "spontaneous, free and outgoing, for the new man is a divine reality. His freedom is God's own freedom."[3] At the same time, the reality is a hidden reality. Thus Luther speaks of it in his gloss on Romans 6:7-11.

> Now if we be dead by a spiritual death through baptism, in order to end sin with Christ: we believe, because this new life cannot be experienced but must be believed. For no one knows that he lives again or experiences that he is justified, but he believes and hopes that we shall

---

[1]H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, 146.

[2]W. A., 20, 692; cf. Luther, Lenker X, 214; XII, 277-78; Pedersen, Skriftfortolker, 151.

[3]Gustaf Wingren, Luther on Vocation, 204.

> also live in spirit and newness, now and forever, with him.[1]

Note that here the faith element of the paradigm is preserved in dealing with the new man in Christ. Here is Luther's notable simul justus et peccator. The old man has been supplanted by the new, the future has come into the present, but present and old man still remain.

In terms of interpretation, this view means that Scripture will not be totally and completely understood. One can only say:

> So we now understand them, to the extent that we hear and read them; but that they should be understood to their depth, that will not be in this life. But as I said, the longer and the more one learns from them, the less one can, and the more one must, learn.[2]

On the reality of the new life through faith Melanchthon concurs wholeheartedly. We read his comments on Col. 2:10 to this point:

> Pertinet et huc, quod dixit: "Per eum estis consummati," id est: perfecti, renovati, facti nova creatura accepto Spiritu sancto. Humanam vero iustitiam efficit ratio seu liberum arbitrium, quae tamen cor non mutat aut sanctificat, manet enim in corde contemptus Dei et diffidentia et omnes concupiscentiae, Ieremiae 17: "Pravum est cor hominis et inscrutabile."[3]

The apparently gratuitous slur on free will is not uncommon in Melanchthon; it is obvious that he does not share the humanist optimism in the powers of man.[4] Master Philip is at pains to indicate that what

---

[1]Luther, Romans, 184.

[2]Luther, Lenker, XII, 98; cf. X, 211; Luther, Romans, 105.

[3]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 244; cf. IV, 284.

[4]Cf. Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 20, 219.

Christ has effected is vera: "Haec vera pax est, quam Christus in terris efficit erga Deum, quae plane est ipsissima vita aeterna et summum et ineffabile solacium in omnibus afflictionibus."[1]

But this real life is also hidden in God:

> Sicut infra ait vitam Christianorum absconditam esse in Deo, ita hic inquit nos cum Christo sepultos esse, quia sancti non statim accipiunt plenitudinem spiritus, nec statim penitus mortificantur, sed donec in hac vita sunt, sunt testacea vasa, tolerant crucem...tamen fide sustentantur et exspectant redemptionem.[2]

To express the simul Melanchthon opposes the elements in pairs like this: "Iam nihil apparet praeter peccatum. Iustitia et vita est in Christo abscondita, siquidem creditis."[3] The new life, then, is necessary for understanding. "Nisi enim corde audiatur, non cognoscitur...necesse est novum cor fieri."[4]

## Knowing Person as Simul...Et

With the constant reminder of the intransigent presence also of the old man, have we been guilty of just one more kind of optimistic folly, or of pure falsification? To compound the problem, neither Melanchthon nor Luther allows even a kind of formal division of man

---

[1]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 227.

[2]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 248; cf. IV, 283; V. 159.

[3]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 18; cf. IV, 386, 389, 401, 460.

[4]Quoted in Sick, Melanchthon als Ausleger des Alten Testaments, 17; cf. Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 287, 424.

into a spiritual-rational-eternal component over against a physical-material-temporal component. Both explicitly argue for the totus homo view of man.[1] Man cannot then experience the new life in its absolute sense of "already," but must deal with the "not yet." This means that he remains bound to the hurtful fact of history, with its limitations and its contingencies, rather than finding in ascetic ways or moral purifications or mystic escape from reality the resolution of his dilemma of hanging between the two worlds, as Luther put it often.[2]

The way out of the dilemma for both the reformers, was to grasp the nettle firmly, and maintain that in and through his own history, the believing interpreter was led to understand the central word, the evangelical paradigm of the Scripture. This was not without a movement, we might even conclude a special kind of hermeneutical circle, a movement from history to eschatology and back, neither one giving meaning without the other. That seems to be what Bonhoeffer concluded and it is hardly illicit to suggest some typical influence of Lutheran thought on his argument:

> Our thinking, that is, the thinking of those who must go to Christ to know of God, this thinking of fallen man, has no beginning because it is a circle. We exist in a circle. We feel and will in a circle. We exist in a circle. We might then say that in that case there is beginning everywhere. We could equally well say that there is no beginning at all: the decisive point is that

---

[1] Luther, Am. Ed., XXVII, 363; Melanchthon, S. A., V., 205.

[2] W. A., 25, 328.

> thinking takes this circle for the infinite and total reality and entangles itself in a vicious circle.[1]

The actual temporal notions, as Bonhoeffer has stated, thus tend to be obscure, and there is no immediate question of which is prior in point of time, or which realm is dominant.

Even the trials which come to men in time, then, are not sheer accident, but sent of God for His purpose. The principle becomes so broad that Luther could say in a tidy summary: "Whoever believes, to him everything is helpful, nothing is harmful. Whoever does not believe, to him everything is harmful, nothing is helpful."[2] One of the helpful functions is seen to be a proper self-knowledge:

> To such a trial one can come only through patience. And this test takes place in order that everyone may see his inner state of mind (i.e., in order that everyone may come to know himself), whether he really loves God for God's sake; but God knows this, of course, without an examination.[3]

Such self-knowledge is essential because "perfect self-knowledge is perfect humility, and perfect humility is perfect wisdom, and perfect wisdom is perfect spiritualness."[4]

That self-knowledge, for Luther, tends to be an apparently

---

[1]Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall, 10.

[2]Luther, Am. Ed., XXXV, 32; cf. W. A., 5, 165-66; Luther, Lenker, X, 362; Luther, Galatians, 191-92, 400.

[3]Luther, Romans, 159; cf. also p. 79; W. A., 5, 165.

[4]Luther, Romans, 208.

morbid preoccupation with his sinful inadequacy. Aside from the theological necessity of showing the absence of merit in man, this emphasis develops the insistent practical lesson that man must continually turn from his own thoughts, his own reasoning, his own strength in trial to the Word and Christ.

> Das man hie nidden bleibe und sich henge an das fleisch und blut, ja an die wort und buchstaben, die aus seinem mund gehen, dadurch er uns auffs aller feinste hinauff furet zum Vater, das wir keinen zorn noch schrecklich bild, sondern eitel trost, freud und fride finden und fülen.[1]

This is a negative learning, but it can be welcomed with joy, although the turning to the Word results in another negative, that is the opposite, the humiliation of Christ:

> Die Anfechtung gehört so zum Christen, und es gibt kein anderes Zeichen der Gnade wie das dem Propheten Jonas gewährte, drei Tage im Bauch des Walfischs, und das heisst drei Tage in der Hölle zu sein. Deshalb soll der mensch sich freuen, wenn er leiden darf, und wenn Gott das Gegenteil von dem tut, worum er ihm bittet. Nur dort, wo Demut ist, Verwerfung seiner selbst, ja das Nichts, ist die Anerkennung Gottes und die Verwirklichung seiner Ehre möglich. Denn Gott wirkt nur in das Leere hinein.[2]

In the explanation of the 1518 Heidelberg Theses Luther had put it this way:

> The visible and hinder parts of God are set over against those which are visible. These invisible parts mean the humanity of God, his weakness, his foolishness. Paul calls these "the weakness and foolishness of God"

---

[1]W. A., 28, 28. Cf. Luther's letter to Wenzel Link, Luther, Correspondence, II, 448-49.

[2]Seeberg, Erich, Luthers Theologie in ihren Grundzügen, 56.

> (I. Cor. 1:25). For because men put to wrong use their knowledge of God which they had gained from his works God determined on the contrary to be known from sufferings...from now on it could never be enough for a man, nor could it benefit him to know God in his glory and majesty unless he knows him at the same time in the humility and shame of the cross.[1]

The themes of the deus absconditus, of the strange work of God, of the Christ as true man, all converge at this point. It must be noted further that the emphasis is on Christ's cross, and that man's sufferings are not a kind of imitation of His, even though the experience of a cross may lead to consideration of the Cross. The meaning of our cross/suffering, to belabor terms suggested earlier, is heuristic and edifying:

> As it is written in Rom. 5:3: "We glory in our tribulation." The Apostle says this in this place, because he had said we were the house which Christ "builds." A building, however, is nothing else than tension and pressure. Put into other words, we are built by experiencing the cross and sufferings which we go through in Christ. In this way, therefore, he wants us to know that it is necessary for us to be raised and fashioned by a firm faith and glorious hope in him, lest we fail, and in the course of building are the more ruined.[2]

In view of Melanchthon's acknowledged concern for objectivity and his care in setting forth the subjective in a secondary

---

[1]Luther, Early Works, 290-91. The classic exposition of this theme is Walter von Loewenich, Luthers Theologia Crucis (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1954).

[2]Luther, Early Works, 72; cf. W. A., 24, 15; Luther, Galatians, 20; Karl Barth, Lutherfeier 1933 (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1934), p. 14.

position[1] he seems to have dealt uncommonly often with the matter of faith's testing and the resulting learning. For him, too, Romans 5:3-5 is decisive in setting forth the meanings of suffering:

> At christiana patientia haec duo complectitur: oboedientiam et fidem seu fiduciam misericordiae et auxilii Dei. Itaque quando sustinemus afflictionem, simul experimur fidem. Ita "patientia parit probationem;" exercemus enim et experimur fidem, dum patienter toleramus afflictiones. Et significat "probatio," ut ita dicam, explorationem et experientiam fidei nostrae, quam cum exercemus, experimur etiam praesentiam et bonitatem Dei.[2]

Melanchthon speaksof a growth in newness as a result.

> Immo tantum habemus novitatis et vitae, quantum habemus fidei. Quare hanc fiduciam misericordiae teneamus et exerceamus; ita simul etiam crescet novitas. Sed tamen in illis maximis et horribilibus terroribus, cum conscientia sentit peccati magnitudinem et iram Dei, opus est hac consolatione, quod videlicet iusti, h.e. accepti simus non propter nostram novitatem, sed propter Christum.[3]

We must note again how the movement has been made back to Christ. In further direct paralled with Luther, Melanchthon sees the consoling Christ here as the crucified, under the figure of the opposite again:

> Inest in hoc ipso loco et haec consolatio sumpta ab obiecto et causa pavoris. Disputamus enim in afflictionibus, utrum a Deo diligamur, utrum Deus iratus abiecerit nos. Huic tentationi occurrit, cum proponit imaginem Christi. Christus sic afflictus est. Et pater vult nos fieri similes

---

[1]Stupperich, Melanchthon, 94.

[2]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 163-64; cf. IV, 69, 367, 390, 397, 400, 425, 427.

[3]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 160.

> filii. Igitur non affligit, ut perdat, sicut nec filium afflixit, ut perderet. Et hanc praecipuam consolationem sumptam a voluntate Dei hic in fine copiosissime atque ornatissime exaggerat.[1]

Herein is the true sapientia.

> Spiritualis cognoscit stultum Deum per stultitiam. Quomodo stultum? quia comprehendit in Dei stultitia bonitatem et misericordiam; quid enim stultius est quam Deum carnem fieri, id est: peccatum et maledictum per stultitiam et mortificationem, hoc est: contra sensum et iudicium carnis.[2]

The one efficacious sign is the sign of Jonah, "hoc est: Christi mortui et resurgentis."[3] In further testimony: "Altior est sapientia, quam ut stultus adaequatur: Altum esse, est cruce tectum esse. Thesauri enim Dei cruce sunt absconditi."[4]

## Heuristic History sub Contraria

Emil Brunner summarized these thoughts most perceptively in these words:

> The meaning of history...is embodied in actual world history only sub contraria specie, concealed, muddled, falsified, by self-deification and world deification and by the consequent egoism and egocentricity of man. This mixture of meaning and non-meaning in history looks at us from the face of Him who wears a crown of

---

[1]Melanchthon, S. A., V. 245.

[2]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 22.

[3]Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 23; cf. 340, 357, 437.

[4]Quoted in Sick, Melanchthon als Ausleger des Alten Testaments, 17.

> thorns, over whom the representative of Caesar speaks the "Ecce Homo."[1]

We cite this statement not only to underscore the motifs of the contrary and the cross, but to move to a brief consideration of the hope element in these perspectives. (Brunner set the above sentences in the context of his book study on Eternal Hope.)

As the Apostle Paul stated so memorably in I Corinthians 13, faith, hope and love are always allied. We intend no neglect of love, but programmatically would contend that our concern in this study is with faith and hope in their interplay.[2] Peter Lombard's confusion on the relation of faith, hope and reward provided the polemical occasion for both Luther and Melanchthon to counter with major evangelical statements on hope. Lombard's offensive statement was, "Spes est certa expectatio praemii, ex meritis proveniens." These are the highlights of Luther's correcting assertions:

> Ex qua sententia quid aliud potuit sequi quam ruina universae theologiae, ignorantia Christi et crucis eius et oblivio dei diebus innumeris:...At quis sine spe toleret quicquam tribulationis? Desperans enim non ad patientiam nec ad probationem nec ad gloriationem in tribulatione pervenit umquam, sed contra peior fit tribulatione semper....Ubi erit iustus, si nullus peccator poeniteat? At quomodo poenitebit, nisi speret misericordiam dei? ...Primum certum est, gratiam, idest fidem, spem, charitatem non infundi, nisi, peccatum

---

[1]Brunner, Eternal Hope, 86.

[2]Cf. here the incisive statements of Prenter in "Jesus Christ, the Hope of the World," Lutheran World, I, (Spring, 1954), p. 46; and Torrance, Theology in Reconstruction, 109.

> effundatur simul, hoc est peccator non iustificatur, nisi damnetur, non vivificatur, nisi occidatur...ut habet tota scriptura.[1]

Melanchthon reacted similarly:

> Nec est somniandum, quod causa spei sit nostra qualitas et dilectio, qua nos Deum diligimus, sicut hunc locum scholastici interpretantur; neque enim hoc dicit Paulus. Ac plane desperandum esset, si nostra dilectio esset causa spei, cum diligere non possimus, nisi prius fide apprehenderimus misericordiam. Et constant, quam sit immunda et exigua dilectio etc. Quare tenendum est obiecta fidei et spei esse non nostras qualitates, non nostras virtutes, sed dilectionem Dei erga nos ostensam in promissione certa et infallibili.[2]

The reformers' further commentary on Romans 5 and 8 passim elaborates on these themes.

If faith and hope are thus such close correlates, what distinctive character is to be seen in hope? Let us look at a compact definition from Melanchthon as representative:

> Ideo sequitur: "Probatio spem efficit," i.e. cum fide experimur bonitatem Dei, cum fidem exercemus, crescit spes, quae est quaedam perpetua fiducia et exspectatio eventus. Nam fides accipit in praesentia reconciliationem et promissionem de eventu, spes vero exspectat futurum eventum. Quamquam enim sunt cognati et coniuncti motus et affectus fides et spes, tamen hoc modo discerni possunt.[3]

---

[1]W. A., 5, 163-64.

[2]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 166.

[3]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 164.

## Openness to the Future

What is so distinctive and significant here is the exspectatio of the futurum. Some of our recent theological movements have trained us to think in terms of "openness" as the equivalent of these sixteenth century terms of Melanchthon's. Not every theologian who employs the idea of openness to the future is in the direct line or intention of the reformers, but the term may be baptized into our analysis.[1] Professor Torrance has made a qualifying statement in the reformation tradition where he clearly indicates the point at which some theologians have forgotten the underlying theology and have made openness captive to their particular systems. Torrance writes:

> That openness or indefinitenes is part of their adequacy to the object, and belongs to the logic of their reference, and hence it would be most inaccurate or imprecise if it were to be reduced through assimilation to the kind of precision that characterizes the logic of coherence-statements.[2]

In other words, openness to the future means that eschatological considerations are involved. In Torrance's phrases, this means that eschatology is part of the "adequacy to the object," has a "logic of their reference," but may not be "reduced through their assimilation."

---

[1]Examples of helpful applications of the concept of openness to theological problems are found in J. V. Langmead Casserley, Graceful Reason: The Contribution of Reason to Theology (Greenwich, Conn.: The Seabury Press, 1954), p. 30; and W. R. Crockett, "The Theology of Revelation and the Principles of Union," The Ecumenist, VI (May-June, 1968), p. 156.

[2]Torrance, Theology in Reconstruction, 60, cf. p. 50; Hans Urs van Balthasar, A Theology of History (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), pp. 118-19.

Eschatological matters, to be truly open, must be matters of the unknown, of faith and hope and not of sight. This accounts for the great difficulty in incorporating eschatology in a thorough-going way into theological systems. Isaac C. Rottenberg reports the plaint of Noman Pittenger: "Pittenger is convinced that the usual Protestant eschatological theology must be supplemented by a theology that knows of a real presence of the future in this present time of grace."[1] Jacob Taubes views with sorrow what he calls the tragic history of Christian theology:

> The history of the development of Christian theology is a tragic history because there is no "solution" to the conflict between eschatological symbols and the brute fact of a continuing history. One may admire the achievement of theology but at the same time be aware of the price involved in such an achievement.[2]

One of the recurring attempts to incorporate eschatology has been the effort to exploit an apocalyptic view. Though we must admit that Luther, too, was intrigued by apocalyptic in some periods of his life[3] his eschatology is far more complex than the question of the time

---

[1]Isaac C. Rottenberg, Redemption and Historical Reality (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 121. The Pittenger quotation is from "Christianity and the Eschatological," Anglican Theological Review, XLI, No. 4 (October, 1959), p. 255. Cf. Paul Tillich, The Interpretation of History, pp. 283-84. For a philosopher's critique of the concept of openness, v. Josè Ortega Y Gasset, Concord and Liberty, trans. Helene Weyl (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1946), pp. 73-74.

[2]Jacob Taubes, "On the Nature of the Theological Method: Some Reflections on the Theological Principles of Tillich's Theology," The Journal of Religion, XXXIV No. 1 (January, 1954), p. 13.

[3]Torrance, Kingdom and Church, 18-21.

of the end. We may conjecture that the very fact that the end did not come as or when Luther had expected was a major factor in forcing him to rethink the problem. If this conjecture is valid, we see the corrective force of history at work. Melanchthon expressed his rejection of apocalyptic views in the Loci of 1555.

> As the apostles were commanded only to preach the gospel, the doctrine of the Anabaptists and their ilk is a devil's doctrine, for they say that before the Day of Judgment the kingdom of Christ must be established on earth with physical pomp, and that in this there will be neither godless men nor hypocrites, that only the saints will rule, and that they will forcibly subdue all the godless. The devil has again and again raised up in the church this Judaic dream and fable, for (as history shows) from early times there have been enthusiasts, chiliasts, and Pepuzianists.[1]

## Heuristic Function of Hope

The paragraph above not only discloses Melanchthon's strong feelings against false teachings on the future but also introduces effectively the basis for our final section on the heuristics of hope. We do not intend to develop a full-scale eschatology or eschatologized theology. We believe, however, that the scene is set for bringing out the culmination of the reformers' hermeneutical views as they related to the future, to hope and to the Word.

Melanchthon's clause, "As the apostles were commanded only to preach the gospel," in the paragraph above, is our key. In context,

---

[1]Melanchthon, Christian Doctrine, 277.

this means more than a simplicist admonition to preachers of all times to tend to their homiletical knitting and abjure political or military involvement or the like. Rather the words imply that the way for the believing man to act in hope over against the expected future of God is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the power of God, the viva vox of God in this human history. This is not primarily an act of obedience, rather it is an exercise in hope, which accepts the unknown future of God, and trusts superbly in the Word alone. Moreover, since the reaction to the Word is so often negative, hope must see the future sub contraria specie. In the continuing activity of proclaiming the Word in such faith and hope, the interpreter is led to such greater knowledge as is consonant with, proper to, the openness of the expected future in God.

It would hardly be proper for the interpreter himself to make highly precise, personal claims for the experiencing of success in the interpretation of Scripture because of the religious exercise of hope. In the nature of the case, the heuristic character of hope must be hidden even from the teacher of Scripture, in an ultimate sense, if that teacher is not to be presumptuous and to claim a work of righteousness. In view of these arguments, we may legitimately bring to bear the external validations of the effectiveness of hope in opening out the Scripture for the reformers.

We have noted above the personal religious positions of Luther and Melanchthon. We can not deny to either of them the designation of

giants of faith. In their callings and in their primary interests they were men of the Word. They ventured their lives on that Word. We may not always see dramatic challenges to their safety or public acceptance such as the roof-tile-numerous demons of Worms for Brother Martin, but they both knew the hazards, yet believed and hoped. The Christian world has acknowledged how singularly, out of this faith and hope, the Word of God was interpreted for the salvation and edification of so many millions. The argument is not limited to these two men, it is self-evidently proven by the other great Biblical reformers, by those pre-reformation forerunners in the gospel understanding whom Heiko Oberman has delivered up for our study and appreciation. It is at this point that the attestation of every pious believer is circumstantial evidence.

What we must still do is to adduce some testimonials in which, as it were inadvertently, the heuristics of hope is betrayed. In his notes on the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, Luther imaginatively and movingly describes Noah as witness to the Word:

> The usual consequences follow when faithful teachers teach faithless hearers. They are mockery and slander; blasphemy, contempt and ignominy; especially when the evil threatening them is delayed, and the delay gives them new heart and assails the faith of the preacher with obvious and manifest proof. How often was Noah condemned as a fool, how often as a liar, how often as a babbler of utter nonsense, and not just by one person but by everybody, especially during the time that he was carefully building the ark, trusting only his own judgment and standing against the opinion of every man! This he did to such a degree that he discerned the one and only Word of God before everybody else; he used to listen to it, put it to the test, and always and continually preferred it to all else....That is why the faith of Noah was

> not that quiet "quality of soul" that we tend to dream faith is, but it is the inner life of the heart.[1]

The preacher of the gospel in his own time must expect similar dishonor, Luther maintained, and could glory only in the disgrace:

> We must note that preaching the gospel was a despised and dishonorable office, as it still is today. For it receives no honor and glory but is exposed to every kind of reproach, disgrace, persecution, etc....Now what befalls Christ, and this means truth--for Christ is the truth--befalls also the ministers of Christ, i.e., of the truth....Truth gives birth to hatred. But this hatred brings forth grace. Hence, we must "ambitiously" seek to be hated, i.e., we must seek grace even through hatred.[2]

The sub contraria for Luther was not only a personal element with which the preacher must reckon. The very nature of the proclamation of the truth of the Word was to evoke strife and dissension. In spite of this the Word must be set forth, and from the dissension sub contraria the Word was established:

> To sum it up, gracious Lords, your Graces must not interfere with the office of the Word. Let them go on boldly and confidently preaching what they can and against whom they will; for, as I have said, there must be divisions, and the Word of God must take the field and fight....If their spirit is true, he will not fear us and will hold the field; if our Spirit is true, He will not be afraid of him or of anybody. Let the spirits fight it out. If some are led astray,

---

[1]Luther, Early Works, 212.

[2]Luther, Romans, 417-18; cf. Lenker, X, 46-47, 131, 154, 167, 225, 285, 405-06, 440, 446; XXIV, 20; W. A., T. R. 2, No. 1240; Luther, Am. Ed., XII, 7; W. A., 41, 104.

> that is the fortune of war...[1]

> Let us learn therefore even by the title which Christ giveth to the devil, to wit that he is the father of lying and murder (John viii.), that when the Gospel flourisheth and Christ reigneth, then sects of perdition must needs spring up and murderers, persecuting the truth, must rage everywhere.[2]

John M. Headley has stated that the heuristic character of the persecutions of the church works in this way:

> Luther argues that Jerome and most of his contemporaries could not understand Paul because they were not exposed to the necessary tribulations; if one is to arrive at the true sense of Scripture, he must be exercised externally by tyrants and heretics and internally by the terrible weapons of Satan....And even within the medieval understanding of periodization Luther's use indicated that he considered these persecutions less as periods in Church history and more as necessary constituents of the Church's life and the Christian experience.[3]

That there was progress in this strange life of hope Luther asserted flatly: "Ita de spe in spem proficisci recte dicemur."[4] Luther's often-stressed principle of humility was uniquely apropos in this matter.

> Therefore, we must always be ready to surrender our own point of view so that we do not stumble on this rock of offense (cf. Rom. 9:32; Isa. 8:14), i.e., the truth which

---

[1]Luther, Correspondence, II, 246. Letter to Elector Frederic and Duke John of Saxony (Wittenberg, July, 1524). Cf. Luther, Galatians, 430-33.

[2]Luther, Galatians, 435.

[3]Headley, Luther's View, 153.

[4]W. A., V, 164; cf. Luther, Galatians, 460, 464.

> in humility stands over against us and is contrary to what we think it ought to be. We are so presumptuous as to believe that only what we think is the truth, and we want to hear and see as truth only what we agree with and approve. But this cannot be.[1]

When Luther expatiated on that favorite "knight of faith," Abraham, as he went out "having nothing to follow except the Word of God," he cried out lyrically of this work of God in the man of faith living in hope:

> But this is the glory of faith, simply not to know: not to know where you are going, not to know what you are doing, not to know what you must suffer, and with sense and intellect,virtue and will, all alike made captive, to follow the naked voice of God, to be led and driven, rather than to go.[2]

Whatever happens, whatever is given of experience and insight, like all else in this life is given, is grace, from the God who "leads and drives."

We have not been entirely fair to Melanchthon in generalizing about his character as a timid lover of peace, avoiding controversy. Even in 1555, after enduring so much of the "rabies theologorum" he could insist on the necessity of continuing to preach that divisive and tumult-provoking word:

> In our times, as the eternal God out of his great and unutterable mercy has again caused the light of his holy gospel to shine clearly among us, and has caused many errors and idolatries of the papists to be rebuked, the great prelates have grown angry...and cry out that we have caused dissension, departed from the orderly power

---

[1]Luther, Romans, 103; cf. Luther, Lenker X, 367.

[2]Luther, Early Works, 213; cf. Luther, Lenker X, 410; Luther, Galatians, 458.

> of the Church....Although such blasphemies trouble reasonable men not a little, we should nevertheless maintain that we shall not act contrary to or allow true doctrine to decrease even though the opponents are greatly angered and cause dissension and persecution.[1]

With quiet equanimity, Melanchthon also accepted the unhappy fact of the troubles which teachers and hearers of the Word faced because of that Word:

> Observemus autem hic honestissimas laudes ministerii verbi, quod videlicet evangelii praedicatio, enarratio, tractatio sint sacrificia necessaria novi testamenti. Id consolari debet et docentes et discentes evangelium inter tot molestias, quae utrisque perpetiendae sunt. Doctores sciant.../hunc cultum Dei/ Deo placere, etiamsi homines alii negligenter audiunt evangelium, alii contemnunt, alii etiam persequuntur.[2]

Melanchthon recognized the question posed by the misery of the Church and of all believers in this life was a conundrum, especially to non-believers. His treatment of the question in the Examen ordinandorum of 1552 is reminiscent of Augustine's City of God. A key paragraph from that document discloses Master Philip's emphasis on humility and hope and the heuristic capacity of the Church's struggle for the Gospel of Christ:

> Diese grosse ding kan niemand ausreden. Aber dabey sollen wir gleichwol lernen, als kleine kindlin, das Gottes gerechter will ist, das wir uns unter in warhafftiglich demütigen sollen und sollen dem Herrn Christo im leiden nach unserer gering mass folgen und ernach in ewigkeit umb seinet willen Göttlichere

---

[1]Melanchthon, Christian Doctrine, 318.

[2]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 366; cf. IV, 172-73, 281.

weisheit, gerechtigkeit und freuden teilhafftig sein.[1]

Only the Word of the Scripture can effect this. "Non alias revelationes, non alias illuminationes quaerendas aut exspectandas esse de caelo."[2] Melanchthon's gratitude for that Word and his simple confidence in it he acknowledged in the closing lines of his commentary on Romans:

> Deus itaque gubernet corda nostra propter dominum nostrum Iesum Christum spiritu sancto, ut evangelium de caelo traditum retineamus et in agnitione et fiducia Christi proficiamus et ut gloriam evangelii omnibus piis officiis ornemus et reddat ecclesiae concordiam piam et perpetuam! Amen. Deo gratia.[3]

Luther's encapsulation of his attitude we draw from that noble hymn which has informed not only Protestantism, but the whole Church of God of these intervening centuries, and encouraged the living hope in the Word of the promise:

> And though this world, with devils filled,
> Should threaten to undo us;
> We will not fear, for God hath willed
> His truth to triumph through us:
> The prince of darkness grim,
> We tremble not for him;
> His rage we can endure,
> For lo! his doom is sure,
> One little word shall fell him.

---

[1]Melanchthon, S. A., VI, 216; cf. IV, 72ff., 373, 394-95.

[2]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 358.

[3]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 371; cf. IV, 53, 260.

That word above all earthly powers,
No thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through him who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.[1]

---

[1]Service Book and Hymnal of the Lutheran Church in America, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1958), 150.

# CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of propounding academic theses is to project ideas into the arena of discussion and testing. Quite properly, then, our theses of the foregoing pages, and in particular those of the chapter just preceding, are to be scrutinized critically. In these concluding paragraphs we shall attempt to anticipate some of the general points of question regarding this dissertation.

We have laid considerable stress on the heuristic function of the paradigm of God's saving activity. This function is not to be tested ultimately from a pragmatic consideration. On the other hand, what is heuristic should stimulate inquiry and lead to the opening of new perspectives. We contend that this is one of the results of our thesis, and that a renewed study of the history of hermeneutics in general from this perspective would yield great rewards. In our own historical section (Chapter II) we touched in a general way on this point of view, but in the interests of our structure we did not inquire into the specifics of the heuristic paradigm. It seems to us self-evident that further study of the hermeneutics of Luther and Melanchthon also along the lines of our central affirmations would continue to yield vigorous and fresh understandings.

We desire to probe briefly along four lines of defence of our thesis: these are testings of the consistency, coherence, acceptability and applicability of the subjective element as developed in the heuristic paradigm.

In defence of the matter of consistency, we maintain first that our propositions are consistent with the general theological positions of Luther and Melanchthon. We believe that their understandings of the free grace of God in Christ, of the sinfulness of man, of the nature of faith and the character of the Scripture as Word of God are not only recognized by our position but enhanced and given deeper understandings through our hermeneutical perspective. We have attempted to adduce sufficient evidences from the primary sources to convince the reader that we have here represented not some remote and occasional comments of the reformers, but their central and essential position. We believe that our citations are representative of a mass of similar statements which might be brought in evidence, from both Luther and Melanchthon, at all stages of their reforming life.

We contend, further, that our thesis is consistent with the self-expressed sense of vocation of the reformers. This means two things: the one that at the center of their evangelical concern they are united, the other that in their individual response to the demands of vocation at given times and in given circumstances, they worked out from this center in ways somewhat differing methodologically, but appropriate to the situation in their intentions. We do not feel obligated to defend the

utter rightness of the exegetical conclusions in those given situations, since we have adequately affirmed above that both men understood the human limitation and the propensity to error which required continual humility unto prayer. In support of these conclusions on vocation we cite the work of Ernst Bizer and Wilhelm H. Neuser as key witness. We have the results of Ernst Bizer's analysis of Melanchthon in Theologie der Verheissung. The title is revealing, and suggests the parallel with Bizer's earlier solid study of Luther in Fides ex Auditu. Bizer is concerned about the center, faith and the promise of God. At that point he concludes the two reformers are at one:

> Das Ergebnis unserer Untersuchung scheint mir eindeutig. In allen hier berührten Themen stimmt Melanchthon mit Luther überein. Unser Kommentar zeigt, soweit ich sehen kann, keine einzige sachliche Differenz. Melanchthon hat das Zentrum der Anschauung Luthers aufgenommen und von da aus auf seine Weise und mit seinen Mitteln weitergearbeitet.[1]

Bizer has in mind specifically the matter of exegesis. On this he concludes "Melanchthon und Luther auch in Detail ihrer Auslegung eng übereinstimmen."[2] In this latter judgment we concur heartily; similarities are often almost suspicious.

Wilhelm H. Neuser has done a sober and impressive short monograph which betrays its conclusions in its title, Luther und Melanchthon--

---

[1]Bizer, Theologie der Verheissung, 286.

[2]Bizer, Theologie der Verheissung, 278.

Einheit im Gegensatz.[1] After studying a broad selection of source materials, Neuser concludes that Luther recognized and accepted differences between his own statements and Melanchthon's. Neuser writes: "Luther liess ein Vielfalt in der Lehre bestehen, weil er seine eigene Lehre nicht verabsolutierte. Das Evangelium war sein Massstab, wann aus der Vielfalt ein unerträglicher Lehrgegensatz wurde."[2] He notes further that Melanchthon himself recognized two goals for his theology which would determine respective styles. One was for Christian understanding, especially for the youth, the other was the professional, more philosophical approach.[3] Melanchthon could thus make different approaches in view of his own varied goals, and he recognized that he and Luther at times were confronting different tasks, hence operated in differing ways.[4] Luther did not insist on a system of theology: he worked out from the middle point of the gospel of Jesus Christ "und kann daher Lehrdifferenzen ertragen."[5] Luther operated from the premise of his belief that God worked in different ways through different men, and that his gifts and Melanchthon's were quite different.[6] On his side,

---

[1]Wilhelm H. Neuser, Luther und Melanchthon--Einheit im Gegensatz (Müchen: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1961).

[2]Neuser, Luther und Melanchthon, 23.

[3]Neuser, Luther und Melanchthon, 24.

[4]Neuser, Luther Und Melanchthon, 19.

[5]Neuser, Luther und Melanchthon, 35.

[6]Neuser, Luther und Melanchthon, 39.

Melanchthon maintained that he and Luther were "in der Sache einig" but he himself taught "weniger schroff" than Luther, and problems arose because of those who made too much of some of the "sehr groben Aussagen Luthers."[1] Let these be our final conclusions with respect to the presumed differences between Luther and Melanchthon--in all things, and in this present hermeneutical concern. Melanchthon may indeed have been more concerned than Luther to enunciate clear-cut ethical principles out of the Scripture.[2] He may have been more concerned for utilizing the structures of rhetoric in his expositions, and for method in setting forth doctrines as he manifested so powerfully in the Loci Communes. However, even a most conservative scholar like Robert Preus maintains that in doing so he imported "merely method."[3] Perhaps our best referee in this debate would be any preacher who has turned professor and been forced to counter the ridiculous question as to whether he senses more of a "call" in the classroom than he did in the parish. Whether or not van den Brink has shared this experience or not we do not know, but he does say significantly, "Melanchthon is out to cultivate living faith and therefore he needs an audience. He finds

---

[1]Neuser, Luther und Melanchthon, 18.

[2]Heinrich Bornkamm, Das Jahrhundert der Reformation: Gestalten und Kräfte (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), p. 78; cf. Melanchthon, S. A., IV, 307.

[3]Robert Preus, "Melanchthon the Theologian," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXI (August, 1960), 171. Cf. Rolf Schäfer, "Melanchthons Hermeneutik im Römerbrief-Kommentar von 1532," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, LX, (1963), 222.

this not only at the university, but also in the congregation."[1]

Today's critics can only reflect the records left by the reformers themselves. The record shows a most warm and trusting personal relationship throughout the long years of their work together at Wittenberg. Such tensions as are to be found in the history are hardly more than the usual difficulties and misunderstandings of friends and colleagues over the space of almost three decades. When a man as outspoken as Luther was involved, one does not need to ascribe jealousy or touchiness to account for the sometimes sharp public criticism which in the last analysis means next to nothing.

In a letter to Staupitz, Luther commended his young colleague, writing

> Christ willing, he will surpass many Martins and will be a mighty foe of the devil of the scholastic theology. He knows their tricks and also the Rock Christ. He will powerfully prevail.[2]

After he had "stolen" Melanchthon's lecture notes through a student, and sent the commentary material on Romans and the Corinthian letters to the printers with his high praise attached[3] Luther "forcibly" took "against the resistance of the author, his Notes on the Gospel of

---

[1]J. A. B. van den Brink, "Bible and Biblical Authority in the Early Reformation," Scottish Journal of Theology, XIV (December, 1961), 346; v. also p. 347.

[2]Quoted in Richard, Philip Melanchthon, 59.

[3]C. R., 15, 441.

John."[1] Luther contended that Philip's work did what a Biblical commentary should do, and used the work of Paul as the point of comparison.

Melanchthon returned the compliment in according to Luther the highest praise in his understanding of Paul.

> Luther is answering your question on Paul, and what is more apt than his answer? No one known to me of all the Greek and Latin writers has gotten nearer Paul's spirit.[2]

The whole of Melanchthon's funeral oration over Luther corroborates this affirmation of his highest praise and fullest trust.

If our premise of consistency with the total theological positions of the reformers, as stated above, is correct, we have already affirmed a coherence in our theme, dictated by the prior coherence of the theology. More specifically, we argue for a coherence under the premise of "from faith to faith." That is to say that the unique type of hermeneutical circle with which we are here concerned is unified. This circle of movement begins with either a temporal or a cosmic basis. Temporally we have pointed out above the movement from present to promised future and back to present, that is, from history to eschatology to history. Cosmically, we move from this world to the coming world and back to this world. In a statement of amazing depth and beauty Luther says

---

[1]Luther, Correspondence, II, 187-88.

[2]Luther, Correspondence, I, 330. Letter of Melanchthon to John Hess at Breslau, June 8, 1520.

> For generally, when people begin to be pious, they do it through human teaching and outward holiness, but we must abandon this and come to pure faith and not suffer ourselves again to fall from faith into works. Thus we surely come into our fatherland, from which we have come, that is, God, by whom we have been created. The end thus comes together with the beginning in a golden ring.[1]

In a similarly profound passage explicating the difficult statement in Romans 8:20, Melanchthon concludes:

> Sicut igitur tota universitas rerum exspectat liberationem nec mora frangitur, ita nos sustineamus saevitiam et iniurias diaboli nec desperemus propter moram, sed sciamus fore, ut liberemur, etsi neque modum neque tempus, quo id fiet, praevidemus, sicut nec mundus praevidet.[2]

We are keenly aware of the difficulty of incorporating within a theological methodology, a theory of hermeneutics, so much of eschatology. The continuing problem of theology and eschatology outlinedabove has sufficiently cautioned us about over-confidence in our ability to conquer this impasse. In the present temper among many theologians whose catch-word is "secular" we are not expecting a warm audience. Some words of Gordon D. Kaufman polemicizing against Karl Barth, relate to our basic paradigm: "His /Barth's/ general conception of the category of the historical is defective in that he defines it principally (as is his wont) in terms of God's action upon the historical

---

[1]Luther, Lenker, X, 455.

[2]Melanchthon, S. A., V, 239. On some of the intriguing philosophical aspects of the hermeneutical circle, v. Karl Löwith, "Knowledge and Faith," Religion and Culture, ed. Walter Leibrecht, pp. 209-10.

being and insufficiently in terms of the self-creative action of that being."[1] Since we on our part cannot accept the naive view Kaufmann reveals elsewhere in delineating his historicist perspective we are not gravely troubled. The offending passage completely ignores the ambiguity of history with which we have concerned ourselves:

> If one stands within the Christian tradition, which knows of a loving and powerful Creator, it is hardly surprising that he will tend to see the course and destiny of his own being--i.e., its limits on all sides--as determined by the activity of God: God's mercy and benevolence toward him will be felt in that which seems good in life; his judgment and wrath, in the painful and constrictive.[2]

We have attempted seriously in all of the material presented in this dissertation to marshal secondary sources which indicate the acceptability of the component parts leading up to our ultimate statement. Thus we have drawn on competent academics who have dealt with the general problems, not specifically in terms of the problem of Luther and Melanchthon. How acceptable is our final statement to such critics? Let us draw on some representative spokesmen in answer.

We quote first from Paul Tillich as spokesman for a more liberal point in the theological spectrum:

---

[1]Gordon D. Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 278, n. 13. Contrast to this Thomas F. Torrance's on history and eschatology in Kingdom and Church, pp. 2-4.

[2]Gordon D. Kaufman, "On the Meaning of God: Transcendence without Mythology," Harvard Theological Review, LIX, (April, 1966), 130.

> In Luther justification is the individual person's experience of both the divine wrath against his sin and the divine forgiveness which leads to a person-to-person relation with God without the cosmic and ecclesiastical framework of Paul or Augustine. This is the limitation in Luther's thought which has led both to an intellectual orthodoxy and to an emotional pietism. The subjective element was not counterbalanced in him. But his "psychology of acceptance" is the profoundest one in church history and confirmed by the best insights of contemporary "psychology of depth."[1]

Although this statement represents a qualified endorsement, we feel it points to some of our own key concepts with approval.

The following lengthy citation from Karl Barth seems also to be analogous to our primary arguments:

> We must approach this matter more closely. When by God's miracle His Word in its worldliness is addressed to us and grasped by us, that may mean first that we really hear the "God with us" there spoken to us, but hear it only in the worldly form in which it is spoken to us. But it may mean, on the other hand, that we indeed hear it in its wordly form, but really hear it in that way. From God's side that is the same thing, but for us it is altogether not the same thing but two things, or one thing only for faith. The one time God unveils Himself to us in His Word, but by the very fact that He veils Himself. The other time He veils Himself, but at the same time He actually unveils Himself also....We can neither remain rooted before the worldly form as such nor fly beyond this and hope to enjoy ourselves still with the divine content only. The one would be realistic, the other would be idealistic theology, and both would be wrong theology. Both times, however, we in faith hear only the whole, the real Word of God. A removal of the distinction, nay opposition, between form and content we cannot achieve.... Faith means rather recognizing that this synthesis cannot be achieved, committing it to God and seeking and finding it in God. By finding it in God we acknowledge that we cannot find it ourselves and so can neither achieve it in

---

[1]Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, III, 226-27.

> a definite attitude in life nor think it systematically. But by committing it to God and seeking it in Him, we do find it, we hear the whole, the real word of God, i.e., now the divine content in its worldly form, now in the worldly form the divine content.[1]

In some sectors, at least, of contemporary Roman Catholic thinking, our conclusions would, apparently be acceptable. Thus, for example, the validation of a similar hermeneutic by Karl Rahner poses a fascinating commentary on the foregoing Lutheran study and the present ecumenical dialogue. At the Symposium held at St. Xavier College, Chicago, March 31st to April 3rd, 1966, under the auspices of the John XXIII Institute, Rahner defined a transcendental anthropology in its relation to the contemporary task of theology and to the problems of Christian knowing.

After making clear that he did not intend a view of man which militated against a theocentric, Christocentric theology, Rahner made these statements:

> Such an anthropology must, of course, be a transcendental anthropology. Transcendental questioning asks about a thing from the point of view of the necessary conditions <u>in the subject itself</u> that make it possible for that thing to be known or done by the subject concerned. Such questioning presupposes that the knowing subject is not simply a thing among other things, in such a way that one can indeed speak about it on occasion if one will, but that in other statements about other things it is not even implied.... For the statement to be possible, certain necessary conditions in man himself are presupposed and are therefore

---

[1]Barth, C. D., I/1, 199-201.

implicitly affirmed in the statement.[1]

> It is of the essence of all knowledge (including, therefore, theological knowledge) that an inquiry regarding an object of knowledge is also an inquiry regarding the being of the knowing subject....The knowing subject must be inquired about, since it is only in the subject himself as such, because of his own subjective individuality, that the whole has meaning, as that toward which its transcendentality is directed.[2]

Although Rahner, in treating briefly of the presence of this perspective in the church, makes no mention of the Protestant Reformers, it seems significant that he works with the simul justus et peccator concept.[3] In his concluding statements of the applicability of the principle the references both to eschatology and to hermenuetics in the following paragraph are revealing:

> An eschatology which would measure up to modern demands needs as a basis a transcendental anthropology, in which man appears as that being who projects himself towards the expanding future, as the being characterized by hope and which has been made capable of an absolute future by God. Only in the light of such a futurology which has a transcendental and anthropocentric form can we discover those hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of eschatological statements.[4]

---

[1]T. Patrick Burke, ed., The Word in History: The St. Xavier Symposium (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), p.2.

[2]Burke, ed., The Word in History, 8-9.

[3]Burke, ed., The Word in History, 15.

[4]Burke, ed., The Word in History, 22-23; cf. the comments of Stephen Pfürtner, Luther and Aquinas on Salvation, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 30, 73.

We find two references from the Orthodox theologian, Georges Florovsky, very apt to our defence: "Faith does not create a new value; it only discovers the inherent one. Faith itself is a sort of vision, 'the evidence of things not seen.'"[1] That statement alone might appear very mystical, but in a monograph titled "The Predicament of the Christian Historian," Florovsky gives some invaluable background only partially represented in the following words:

> But precisely because history was apprehended as "God's history," the "history of man" was made possible. Man's history was then apprehended as a meaningful story and no longer as a reiteration of the cosmic pattern, nor as a chaotic flux of happenings. The history of men was understood in the perspective of their salvation, that is, of the accomplishment of their destiny and justification of their existence.[2]

In the combination of these two perspectives we find a basic acceptance of our premises on the heuristic paradigm.

The final test of applicability is virtually impossible to document in satisfactorily concrete terms. If our thesis is valid, the documentation should be drawn from all evangelical preaching through the ages. We should cite the "strangely warmed" heart of a Wesley on looking into Luther's Galatians, we should somehow explicate the inexplicable intuition of the simple believer who has in John Baillie's terms,

---

[1]Georges Florovsky, "Revelation and Interpretation," Biblical Authority for Today, ed. Richardson, p. 170.

[2]Georges Florovsky, "The Predicament of the Christian Historian," Religion and Culture, ed. Leibrecht, p. 162; v. also p. 147.

employed in one of his last lectures at New College, "sucked the marrow out of Scripture."[1] Let it be sufficient to cite one paragraph for all of these possibilities. Let that paragraph be from John Donne, standing aside from denominational and systematic divisions in the position of one of the classic preachers in the Church's history. Let the words come from the heart of a man troubled by the hurts of history he had invited on his own person, compounded by the pains that came without invitation. Let the preacher say:

> Now, how is this future thing, (There shall be a Messias) a signe of their present deliverance from that siege? First, In the notion of the Prophet, it was not a future thing; for, as in Gods owne sight, so in their sight, to whom he opens himselfe, future things are present. So this Prophet says, Puer datus, filius natus, unto us a child is borne, unto us a Son is given: He was not given, he was not borne in six hundred yeares after that; but such is the cleareness of a Prophets sight, such is the infallibility of Gods declared purpose. So then, if the Prophet could have made the King beleeve, with such an assurednesse, as if he had seene it done, that God would give a deliverance, to all mankinde, by a Messias, that had been signe enough, evidence enough to have argued thereupon, That God who had done so much a greater worke, would also give him a deliverance from that enemy, that pressed him then: If I can fixe my selfe, with the strength of faith, upon that which God had done for man, I cannot doubt of his mercy, in any distresse: If I lacke a signe, I seeke no other but this, That God was made man for me.[2]

---

[1]Cf. J. C. K. von Hofmann, Interpreting the Bible, trans. Christian Preus (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), p. xiii.

[2]Theodore Gill, ed., The Sermons of John Donne (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1958), p. 101.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MOST-USED WORKS

Primary Sources


Luther, Martin. Works. 36 vols. Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955--.

_____. Works. 6 vols. Ed. Henry Eyster Jacobs et al. Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Co., 1915-32.

_____. The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther. 15 vols. Ed. John Nicholas Lenker. Minneapolis, Minn.: Lutherans in All Lands Co., 1903--.

_____. Werke. 58 vols. Ed. J. K. F. Knaake et al. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-1948.

_____. Deutsche Bibel. 7 vols. Ed. P. Pietsch et al. Weimar: H. Böhlau.

_____. The Bondage of the Will. Trans. J. I. Packer, O. R. Johnston. London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1957.

_____. Luther's Correspondence and other Contemporary Letters. 2 vols. Trans. and ed. Preserved Smith. Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1913-18.

_____. Early Theological Works. Trans. and ed. James Atkinson. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962.

_____. A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. Prepared by Philip S. Watson. London: James Clarke & Co., 1953.

_____. Lectures on Romans. Trans. and ed. Wilhelm Pauck. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961.

Melanchthon, Philip. Corpus Reformatorum. Phillippi Melanchthonis operae quae supersunt omnia. Ed. C. G. Bretschneider and H. E. Bindsell, Halis Saxonium: 1834-60.

_____. Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl. 6 vols. Ed. Robert Stupperich et al. Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1951--.

_____. Melanchthon on Christian Doctrine. Trans. and ed. Clyde Leonard Manschreck. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

_____. The Loci Communes of Philip Melanchthon. Trans. Charles Leander Hill. Boston: Meador Publishing Co., 1944.

_____. Selected Writings. Ed. Elmer Ellsworth Flack and Lowell J. Satre. Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962.

Periodical Articles

Ebeling, Gerhard. "The New Hermeneutic and the Early Luther," Theology Today, XXI (April, 1964), 34-46.

Fraenkel, Peter. "Revelation and Tradition," Studia Theologica, XIII (No. 2, 1959), 97-133.

Kuhn, Harold B. "The Problem of Human Self-transcendence in the Dialectical Theology," Harvard Theological Review, XL (January, 1947), 47-68.

Laistner, M. L. W. "Antiochene Exegesis in Western Europe during the Middle Ages," Harvard Theological Review, XL (January, 1947), 19-31.

Lueker, Erwin L. "Luther and Melanchthon," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXI (August, 1960), 476-78.

Preus, Robert. "Melanchthon the Theologian," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXI (August, 1960), 469-475.

Schäfer, R. "Melanchthons Hermeneutik im Römerbrief-Kommentar von 1532," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, LX (1963), 216-35.

Tate, J. "Plato and Allegorical Interpretation," Classical Quarterly, XXIII (July-October, 1929), 142-54.

_____. "On the History of Allegorism," Classical Quarterly, XXVIII (April, 1934), 105-14.

_____. "The Beginnings of Greek Allegory," Classical Review, XLI (December, 1927), 214-15.

Torrance, T. F. "Scientific Hermeneutics according to St. Thomas Aquinas," The Journal of Theological Studies, XIII (October, 1962), 259-339.

## Books

Aldridge, John William. The Hermeneutic of Erasmus. Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1966.

Baillie, John. The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought. London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, 1956.

_____. Our Knowledge of God. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959.

Bainton, Roland H. Here I Stand. New York: Pierce and Smith, 1950.

Bainton, Roland H., Quanbeck, Warren A., Rupp, E. Gordon. Luther Today. Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1957.

Barth, Karl. Church Dogmatics. 4 vols. in 12. Trans. G. T. Thomson et al. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1949--.

Bizer, Ernst. Theologie der Verheissung. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964.

Blackman, E. C. Biblical Interpretation. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957.

Boman, Thorlief. Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek. Trans. J. Moreau. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960.

Bornkamm, Heinrich. Gott und die Geschichte nach Luther. 2. Aufl. Lüneberg: Heliand-Verlag, 1947.

Brunner, Emil. Eternal Hope. Trans. Harold Knight. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954.

Burleigh, John Henderson Seaforth. The City of God. London: Nisbet, 1949.

Burnaby, John. Amor Dei. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1947.

Carré, Meyrick H. Realists and Nominalists. London: Oxford University Press, 1946.

Cochrane, Arthur C. The Existentialists and God. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956.

Colish, Marcia L. The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

Croce, Benedetto. History: Its Theory and Practice. Trans. Douglas Ainslie. New York: Russell & Russell, 1960.

Cunliffe-Jones, H. The Authority of the Biblical Revelation. London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1945.

Daniélou, Jean. Origen. Trans. Walter Mitchell. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955.

_____. The Theology of Jewish Christianity. Trans. and ed. John A. Baker. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964.

Davies, Rupert E. The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers. London: The Epworth Press, 1946.

Dillenberger, John. God Hidden and Revealed. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953.

Ebeling, Gerhard. Evangelische Evangelienauslegung: Eine Untersuchung zu Luthers Hermeneutik. 2 Aufl. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962.

_____. Kirchengeschichte als Geschichte der Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift. Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1947.

Erikson, Erik H. Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1958.

Farrar, Frederic W. History of Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961.

Fraenkel, Peter. Testimonia Patrum: The Function of the Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon. Geneve: Gregory Lounz, 1961.

Gilmore, Myron P. The World of Humanism: 1453-1517. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952.

Gogarten, Friedrich. The Reality of Faith: The Problem of Subjectivism in Theology. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959.

Grant, Robert M. The Bible in the Church: A Short History of Interpretation. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1960.

Greschat, Martin. Melanchthon neben Luther. Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1965.

Harnack, Adolf. History of Dogma. 7 vols. Trans. Neil Buchanan et al. New York: Russell and Russell, 1958.

Harrisville, Roy A. His Hidden Grace: An Essay on Biblical Criticism. New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965.

Headley, John M. Luther's View of Church History. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.

Huizinga, J. Erasmus. Ed. Edward W. Bok. New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924.

Klaussner, Joseph. From Jesus to Paul. Trans. William F. Stinespring. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1945.

Littell, Franklin H. (ed.) Reformation Studies: Essays in Honor of Roland H. Bainton. Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1962.

von Loewenich, Walther. Luthers Theologia Crucis. München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1954.

Mackinnon, James. Luther and the Reformation. 4 vols. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925.

Manschreck, Clyde Leonard. Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer. New York: Abingdon Press, 1958.

Michalson, Carl. The Hinge of History. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959.

Milburn, R. L. P. Early Christian Interpretations of History. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1954.

Neuser, Wilhelm H. Luther und Melanchthon - Einheit im Gegensatz. München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1961.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. The Meaning of Revelation. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962.

Nineham, D. E. (ed.) The Church's Use of the Bible Past and Present. London: S. P. C. K., 1963.

Norris, R. A., Jr. God and World in Early Christian Theology. New York: The Seabury Press, 1965.

Oberman, Heiko Augustinus. Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1966.

_____. The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963.

Østergaard-Nielsen, H. Scriptura Sacra et Viva Vox: Eine Lutherstudie. München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1957.

Patterson, L. G. God and History in Early Christian Thought. New York: The Seabury Press, 1967.

Pedersen, E. Thestrup. Luther Som Skriftfortolker I: En studie i Luthers skriftsyn hermenutik og eksegese. København: Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1959.

Prenter, Regin. Spiritus Creator: Studier i Luthers Theologie. 2,udg. København: Samlerens Forlag, 1946.

Ramm, Bernard. Protestant Biblical Interpretation. Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1950.

Richard, James William. Philip Melanchthon: The Protestant Preceptor of Germany 1497-1560. New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1898.

Richardson, Alan. History Sacred and Profane. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964.

Rupp, Gordon. Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms. New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1964.

_____. The Righteousness of God. New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1953.

Schechter, Solomon. Aspects of Rabbinic Theology. New York: Schocken Books, 1961.

Schwarz, W. Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation. Cambridge: The University Press, 1955.

Seeberg, D. Erich. Luthers Theologie in Ihren Grundzügen. 2. Aufl. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1950.

Smalley, Beryl. The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964.

Sowers, Sidney G. The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews. Zürich: Evz-Verlag, 1965.

Sperl, Adolf. Melanchthon Zwischen Humanismus und Reformation. München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1959.

Stupperich, Robert. Melanchthon. Trans. Robert H. Fischer. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965.

Tillich, Paul. The Interpretation of History. Trans. N. A. Rasetzki. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1936.

Torrance, T. F. Kingdom and Church: A Study in the Theology of the Reformation. Fair Lawn, N. J.: Essential Books, 1956.

_____. The School of Faith. London: James Clarke & Co., Limited, 1959.

_____. Theology in Reconstruction. London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1965.

Wilburn, Ralph G. The Historical Shape of Faith. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966.

Wingren, Gustaf. Luther on Vocation. Trans. Carl C. Rasmussen. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957.

Ziemke, Donald C. Love for the Neighbor in Luther's Theology. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963.